Retaining Staff

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Approximately 46% of all teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2003). The problem is intensified for teachers in high-need areas. In some schools, over a five year period, as much as 85% of the teaching staff will have left (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009). Meanwhile, new special education teachers are two and a half times more likely to leave their profession than are teachers in other disciplines (Butler, 2008). Teacher attrition from the profession and movement from school to school together costs the country more than $4.8 billion annually (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). In addition, attrition prevents schools from creating communities where teachers know students and their needs well. No single factor causes high attrition levels, and some attrition is certainly appropriate (e.g., in cases of teacher ineffectiveness) or unavoidable (e.g., attrition due to family or other personal reasons). But to the extent that frequent turnover in the existing talent pool is the result of teacher dissatisfaction with the profession, districts should address the issues that teachers claim affect their decisions to remain in a school or in the profession: salaries, school leadership support, working conditions—including student disciplinary and motivation problems, beginning teacher induction programs, and staff collegiality (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). New special education teachers cite inadequate support and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) with the related paperwork among the primary factors for leaving, while the tremendous pressure to increase English fluency while meeting annual yearly progress requirements impacts ELL teacher retention (Billingsley, 2003; Solis, 2004; Westat, 2002).

Some of these conditions may be addressed simply by creating an open and trusting atmosphere, while others require substantial resources. Because a primary factor affecting teacher retention is a teacher's feelings of effectiveness, many investments in improving teacher effectiveness simultaneously improve teacher retention. For example, in a survey of new teachers it was found that the most commonly cited way to improve the quality of teaching is training teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners and equipping teachers with sufficiently small class sizes to apply these differentiated approaches (Rochkind, Ott, Immerwahr, Doble, & Johnson, 2007). By improving student engagement and behavior, effective differentiated instruction also improves teacher retention.

Since more than two-thirds of teachers from Generation Y (i.e., born between 1977-1995) intend to remain in the classroom for at least the next ten years, there is some reason to be optimistic (Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2009). But districts must actively work to create the leadership supports, collegial cultures, compensation packages, and opportunities to expand one's horizons that are attractive to both highly talented Generation Y and more veteran teachers.

Action Principles

For District

1. Equip teachers with the competencies to apply evidenced-based practices in differentiating instruction and classroom management.

2. Provide training for school leaders in providing instructional leadership and supporting teachers with disciplinary matters.

3. Maintain safe, clean, adequately-resourced school buildings, with particular attention to providing sufficiently small class sizes and support staff, so as to enable effective classroom organization and behavior management.

4. Provide teachers with opportunities for differentiated career tracks and opportunities for growth.

5. Establish reliable, valid, and fair evaluation systems that have the capacity to differentiate among teachers based on specialized roles and are linked with provisions and opportunity for strong professional growth and development.

6. Provide new teachers with formal high quality, data-driven induction that starts prior to the beginning of the academic year and responsive, multi-year mentoring supports aimed at enhancing new teachers' instructional practice.

7. Collaborate with higher education on effective, responsive professional development.

8. Maintain accurate personnel and retention data. Collect and analyze data to support efforts to improve retention.

For School

1. Create a school atmosphere that features trust, professionalism, and shared leadership.

2. Foster a positive, collaborative, and team-oriented school culture.

3. Consistently apply the school's or district's evaluation protocol.

4. Differentiate administrative support for teachers based on experience level and individual needs.

5. Provide adequate planning time for teachers. Structured, collaborative time for teachers in co-teaching roles should be established.

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