

A Local Source for Effective Teachers

The Norwalk-La Mirada, California, School District's two-year training school provides a rich pool of beginning teachers to replace those who retire or leave teaching.

How can a school district develop its own source of effective teachers to replace those who retire or leave education? An innovative and successful answer to the question of excellent teacher supply comes from Norwalk-La Mirada School District in California. George Keplinger, an elementary school principal, who three times has been assigned to a new school and subsequently has produced a highly effective staff, proposed an "entry gate" plan to Superintendent Bruce Newlin. "Kep" proposed that if his school were staffed with five exceptional "group leader" teachers and were given a staff development budget that included a staff development coordinator, then his school could train teachers for other schools in the district.

The cost to the district would be for consultant services, the coordinator, and two-to-five additional paid professional days for his staff for inservice. Then the district's 20 elementary schools would receive teachers certified as effective on the basis of two years' supervised performance. Ineffective teachers would be counseled out or dismissed from Kep's school, relieving other principals of that unpleasant necessity.

The superintendent and the school board, always on the alert for ways to achieve teaching excellence, funded the program at \$45,000 through a Title II grant. Part of the "start up" procedure was to inform all district personnel of the plan and to open all positions in the pilot school to application from anyone who wished to achieve professional excellence. After the second year, the district continued to fund the program from their regular budget.

Key Program Elements

The two-year procedure of developing effective teachers involved three central elements.

First, the district scheduled staff development meetings to promote teachers' skills in task-analyzing district curricular goals, diagnosing students' entry behaviors, prescribing next learning objectives, monitoring progress, and adjusting objectives and teaching on the basis of monitoring students' learning. Meetings also equipped teachers to deal with different learning styles and teaching modes.

Second, the principal and staff development coordinator were trained in observation, script taping, analysis of teaching, and growth-evoking conferencing; and teachers learned to plan together and coach each other in the translation of theory into effective and artistic practice.

Third, the district adopted nongraded team-teaching for the school's organization because it provided optimal conditions for diagnosis and prescription as well as for collegial learning. Learning in a supportive atmosphere equips a teacher to internalize skills and to perform better at a subsequent assignment in a different school.

After two years of training in the pilot school, teachers "graduate" and receive their new school assignments. Their new principals eagerly welcome these teachers who are beginning their careers as polished professionals.

How Participants Benefit

The outcomes of this on-the-job teacher training program are many and varied.

First, the pilot school has produced a disproportionate number of district leaders: principals, assistant principals, resource teachers, inservice specialists, and instructional coaches. For instance, the former school staff development coordinator is now director of staff development for the district.

Second, a Chapter I bilingual school has become a similar training school to prepare bilingual teachers. The principal and team leaders are graduates of the original program. Secondary schools in the district are also adopting the teaching strategies including peer coaching. In addition, a districtwide instructional coaching program has been funded and is staffed by graduates of the pilot school.

Another outcome of the program is that teacher training institutions are placing their student teachers in the pilot school to assure quality training. California State University, Fullerton, and the pilot school have formed a collaborative partnership in preservice teacher education, student teaching, and internships. Because of this natural symbiosis, the school has attracted a number of beginning teachers who look forward to starting their careers in a highly professional atmosphere. As a result of a principal's proposal to solve the ubiquitous problem of supplying quality teachers and a superintendent's support of that solution, there is less guessing about teaching applicants. □

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