

Full Length Research Paper

A case study of the Fort Smith public schools new teacher induction program

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Each year almost 10% of new teachers will leave the teaching profession. By the end of the fifth year of teaching, 30 to 50% of new teachers will have left teaching. One method of retaining new teachers is through the use of new teacher induction programs. These programs help new teachers integrate and adjust to the rigors of teaching with a strong base of support. This paper is a case study of the Fort Smith public schools new teacher induction program. The Fort Smith new teacher induction program began during the 1997 to 1998 school year. Since that time 763 new teachers have participated in the program with 518 still teaching in the Fort Smith schools for a 68% teacher retention rate. Of the 32% who left the district: 14% took teaching position in another district, 17% cited family or personal issues and 1% took administrative positions within the district.

Key words: Public schools, new teacher induction program, teachers, school districts.

INTRODUCTION

Every year in the United States, public schools are facing a serious dropout rate. However the dropout rate is not the students; it is the teachers. The number of teachers leaving the profession is staggering and continues to grow each year. To compound this concern, there are a large number of teachers retiring by the year 2010 and fewer people entering the profession. The nation is also experiencing a growth in the number of school age children, which results in an increasingly larger teacher shortage (Johnson et al., 2005). Within the next 20 years it is estimated that 1.7 to 2.7 million new teachers will need to be hired (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

In a profession that needs so many new teachers, the numbers leaving teaching each year is staggering. According to Johnson et al. (2005), over 200,000 teachers leave the education system each year to join another profession. Among teachers who do enter the profession, 9.3% of them leave within their first year and

over 50% of new teachers leave within their first five years (Dove, 2004). This percentage is even higher in schools located in low socioeconomic inner-city areas (Greiner and Smith, 2006). The loss of teachers is very costly to school districts; the cost to a district every time a teacher leaves may be in excess of \$100,000 (Maryland State Teachers Association, 2007). It is critically important that institutions of higher education as well as public school systems make every effort to examine the cause of teacher attrition and develop programs that will insure that those who enter teaching will remain in the profession for a long term career.

Statement of problem

A current challenge facing public schools is the retention of highly qualified teachers. An often cited figure on new teacher attrition from the national data on teacher mobility as reported by Ingersoll and Smith (2003) is that 46% of new teachers will leave the classroom within the first five years. Therefore, it is critical that school districts begin to implement programs that support new teachers in the

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areas of classroom management, curriculum and also insure they are hired to work in areas where they are certified. It is also important that new teachers are given the support of veteran colleagues. The support of other teachers, both veterans and new, will hopefully help alleviate the everyday stressors that new teachers must face as they work in the isolation of their classroom (Hope, 1999). A sound program of teacher induction and orientation will provide the support that a new teacher needs to be successful in their first five years and allow them to successfully transit into a long term career.

According to Ingersoll and Kralick (2004), there has been little research done on the effectiveness of new teacher induction programs that has been either rigorous or comprehensive. This paper will explore the elements of a high quality teacher induction program, as defined in the literature, and then look at the teacher induction program utilized by the Fort Smith public schools. The teacher induction program utilized by the Fort Smith public schools will be examined to determine the elements of the program and then a review of the qualitative and quantitative data that has been gathered to evaluate the program.

Literature review

The 1980's and 1990's marked the introduction of teacher induction programs to school districts. These programs were aimed at helping new teachers become successful from the transition of teacher preparation to the actual implementation of teaching in the classroom. Teacher induction programs, as defined by Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000), have common goals such as:

- (a) Improving teaching performance;
- (b) Increasing the retention of promising beginning teachers;
- (c) Promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers;
- (d) Satisfying mandated requirements for induction and/or licensure; and
- (e) Transmitting the culture of the system to beginning teachers.

Most induction programs identify new teachers as being teachers directly out of teacher preparation classes or who have only taught one to two years. Increasingly most districts are including veteran teachers who are new to the district (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, ELCC 2.4.a, 2002).

According to the national education association (NEA), the quality of teacher induction programs is affected by: (1) the nature of data collection and analysis, and (2) policies and practices of union affiliates. There are three groups that teacher induction models can be placed into: Basic orientation, instructional practice and school

transformation (Ingersoll, 2002).

Basic orientation model

Many school districts use the simple version of the basic orientation model. This program introduces new teachers to school procedures and district policies which enables a new teacher to learn their responsibilities in the district and their responsibility for basic classroom management. The structure of the program is developed by a series of professional development activities; including the assignment of a mentor teacher. If mentors are assigned, they are typically rendering services in an informal capacity. The veteran teacher very seldom gives attention to modeling effective instructional practice for the new teacher (Ingersoll, 2002).

Instructional practice model

This model covers topics such as classroom management issues, policies and procedures. The instructional practice model links the induction model to state and local standards for high-quality teaching with well-trained and skilled mentors helping to bridge the gap for novice teachers between theory and practice using research-based classroom instruction. This program ideally lasts for two or more years and offers new teachers sustained, content-rich learning (Ingersoll, 2002).

School transformational model

The school transformational model is rarely used as a method of new teacher induction in a school district. This model incorporates the attributes of both orientation and instructional practice models. The school transformation model connects the two induction programs to systematic school-wide renewal efforts that promote continuous learning for new teachers. In this model, the school uses data and research to assess and change its teacher induction program to meet the needs of the teachers. Teachers in this model are able to select professional development that meets their needs for professional growth and the goals for their students learning. The focus is on the teacher as a part of a "community of learners" and enables all faculty members to work together to meet the needs of students in their building. According to the NEA Foundation's definition of high-quality professional development, the school transformation model represents this best (Ingersoll, 2002).

Beginning teachers should not only be a part of a teacher induction program but should also be given support. Support for beginning teachers should be looked

at as a continuum, starting with personal and emotional support. The support should then lead into task- or problem-related support, expanding to the point where the teacher is self-reflective of their teaching practice (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

Personal and emotional support

The first year of teaching is extremely stressful. New teachers face emotional challenges as they attempt to adjust to a new workplace and colleagues. New teachers must also learn basic administrative and organizational issues such as where materials and equipment are located in the building and the building policies and procedures. According to Kaufman et al. (2002), the hardest to staff schools tend to have challenges in the area of classroom management and instruction with which few new teachers are prepared to deal with. The emotional drain of this challenge may be more than many new teachers can withstand.

Fatigue is also another component that new teachers face in their first year of teaching. "Free" time is something that is scarce during the workday as they struggle to find the time to learn new curriculum and plan new lessons. The workday often starts to overflow into their personal time. This leads to exhaustion and results in the new teacher spending all of his/her time working on their classroom responsibilities. They begin to isolate themselves from other teachers in the building, which fosters a sense of isolation (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

Experienced teachers can play a key role in reducing this emotional isolation for new teachers. The veteran teacher can offer support, sympathy, perspective and advice to help alleviate the stress. Although this support may not help improve the instructional skills of the new teacher, it does promote personal and professional well-being which will impact the culture of their teaching. With the support of veteran teachers the likelihood that new teachers will stay in the profession and have the opportunity to become more effective teachers is greatly increased (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

Task or problem focused support

It is important that new teachers are able to gain knowledge of the appropriate approach they should take to solve problems that will inevitably crop up during their first years of teaching. Many new teachers undertake, for the first time, the sole responsibility for developing lesson plans, planning what to say at back-to-school night, grading and structuring parent-teacher conferences. This is where the veteran teacher can step in to help the new teacher. Also, veteran teachers can help the new teacher with those unwritten rules and expectations associated with school, local and state requirements which might

prove overwhelming (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON TEACHING PRACTICES

For new teachers, it is important that they learn to reflect on their students' work as well as their own teaching practices. This is a difficult concept for many new teachers and they need the support and assistance of veteran teachers. With the guidance of a seasoned teacher, the novice teacher should begin to autonomously propose and analyze various situations in their own teaching. This critical self-reflection helps to improve the teaching skills of the new teacher and student learning in the classroom. This reflective practice also builds a personal bond between veteran and novice teacher. This bond reduces stress and builds a "learning community" which helps with the retention of new teachers (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000).

With the number of new teacher induction programs being implemented in school districts, it is important that data is being collected on the effectiveness of these programs. There are five types of data that a district can collect: Program satisfaction, teacher retention, job satisfaction, teacher learning and student impact. Program satisfaction is collected for all types of induction models. Teacher retention, job satisfaction and teacher learning data are gathered for evaluation of the instructional practice model. Data that links student learning to teacher participation in the induction model, though rare, are used to assess the progress of the school transformation model (Ingersoll, 2002).

Satisfaction data are most commonly collected because an end-of-year survey can be given to a new teacher to complete. Also, focus groups can be used to find out how satisfied teachers were with the new teacher induction program. The use of this data is normally used to refine or better meet the needs of future new teachers in these programs. This type of information is very limited in value because it does not measure the true value of the program on impacting teacher retention and overall job satisfaction. This type of data does not measure how the programs have helped the new teachers improve or change their teaching practices to best meet the individual needs of their students (Ingersoll, 2002). Stockard and Lehman (2004) felt that teacher satisfaction is the most critical factor in retaining new teachers. They stated:

"Our results also suggest that teachers' satisfaction is not influenced by their demographic characteristics and to only a relatively minor extent, by the difficulty of their teaching assignment".

Instead, 1st year teachers' satisfaction is greatly influenced by the environments in which they work - the support they receive from others, the control they have over their work environment, the mentoring they receive,

and the extent to which these environments are safe and orderly. These are characteristics that are directly under the control of building administrators and can be encouraged by school district - level policies.

Direct observations of teaching practices are often helpful in allowing administrators to understand what teachers have gained from induction programs. Staff members who provided induction training and other administrative staff can go into classrooms to insure that new teachers are implementing the various strategies in their classroom. New teachers can be observed by their mentors multiple times throughout the year. Research shows that teachers improved gradually from the first observation to the second observation and then more improvement was seen in the third (Ingersoll, 2002).

The collection of student performance data is another way that new teacher induction programs can be evaluated. This data links improved student learning to the teachers' participation in and satisfaction with, the induction program. Districts that do compare teacher induction programs to student learning usually do this as a onetime event. In order for school districts to implement highly effective induction programs they must gather longitudinal data to gauge the effectiveness of induction programs over time. This data can then be used to make informed changes to the program (Ingersoll, 2002).

FORT SMITH PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA

The Fort Smith public school district (FSPS) has an enrollment of over 13,700 students and over 1,000 certificated staff members. It is the fourth largest school district in Arkansas and is fully accredited by the North Central Association and the Arkansas Department of Education (Fort Smith Public Schools, 2007). The Fort Smith Public School District is located in the second-largest city in the state of Arkansas, with an estimated population in 2006 of 83,461. The population under the age of 18 is 25.4%. The median income for a household in the city was \$32,157, and the median income for a family was \$40,012. Males had a median income of \$29,799 versus \$22,276 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$18,994. About 12.1% of families and 15.8% of the population are below the poverty line, including 22.2% of those under age 18 and 9.6% of the age 65 or over (Fort Smith Tree Services, nd (2008). A total of 58% of students receive free/reduced lunch. The district spent \$7,110 per student during the 2006 to 2007 school year (The National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation Systems, 2008).

HISTORY OF THE FORT SMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM

The new teacher induction program was first

implemented in the Fort Smith public schools during the 1997 to 1998 school year. At the time of implementation there was no hard data collected that showed teacher attrition was a major problem, however, the support for new teachers was viewed as a best practice and would be a critical element in improving educational quality for all students. The administrative leadership staff consulted leaders in the field of teacher induction programs and contacted school districts that had been identified as leaders in the field. From this review the initial program was developed. Through the use of on-going evaluations the program has adapted and evolved into its current form. The new teacher induction program will be reviewed using the four of the five criteria identified by Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000). The fifth criterion, which is not addressed, is to increase the retention of promising beginning teachers which is the overall goal of the program and thus included in the other four criteria.

THE FORT SMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS INDUCTION PROGRAM

The Fort Smith public school new teacher induction program utilizes a variety of elements to ensure new teachers are prepared and ultimately successful. The program provides a highly organized and systematic approach to provide the opportunity for new teachers to be successful. The new teacher induction program was designed to familiarize new teachers with the district through an introduction to district staff, policies and resources of the district. This program consists of a four day orientation in August before the first day of school. The summer orientation is a three day session that lasts from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Enclosed in this invitation is the staff's first assignment for the school year. New teachers are also informed of appropriate dress attire, such as "professional casual" (that is, no jeans, shorts and wind suits). This establishes a standard of professional attitude and dress for the new teacher. Five additional professional development afternoons are provided throughout the teachers first year of teaching. This program also insures that new teachers are given a mentor to help give assistance at the building level.

Improving teacher performance - mentoring and programmatic focus

The formal instructional element of the program is based upon the work of Wong and Wong (2004) and each teacher is given a copy of their book on how to be an effective teacher on the first day of school. Each new teacher is also given a binder which will become their depository for new material and will be brought to every meeting. Each new teacher is required to write a reflection each month, which they must bring to the

meetings and share with the other teachers. The sharing of experiences allows the new teachers the opportunity to recognize that they are having common experiences, doubts, frustrations and concerns. This activity also allows the program instructors and mentors to monitor the progress and the issues that each new teacher is facing. New teachers who appear to be having difficulty can then be given additional support and assistance.

Each new teacher is assigned a mentor teacher who will guide the new teacher through the critical first year of teaching. Mentors and new teachers meet regularly and focus on the instructional elements of the program. A high level of trust is developed between the new teacher and the mentor that often lasts for years after the official program has been completed. By working closely with a mentor the new teacher will often avoid the stressors, personal and professional, that so often characterize the first year of teaching.

An entire training session is devoted to classroom management. In a study conducted in the Philadelphia public schools, majority of teachers who stated they were planning to leave the teaching profession cited student behavior as the number one reason they wanted to leave teaching (Johnson et al., 2005). Therefore, teachers who are felt to be struggling with classroom management are provided four additional hours of training as well as additional support from their mentors and other district personnel. Additionally, classroom teachers also are brought into training sessions to share effective classroom management plans. Each new teacher often develops his/her own classroom rules, procedures and consequences. These management plans are then reviewed by district level staff and a written review is then given to the new teacher. The new teacher and his/her mentor teacher will go over the written review and make any changes that they feel are needed. The purpose of this activity is to ensure that every new teacher has a comprehensive and effective system of classroom management.

Promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers: Socialization

The first introductory activity undertaken by new teachers is the creation of a personal poster. Prior to the first in-service session the new teacher develops a poster which defines who the teacher is by utilizing personal pictures, photographs and other items that can be taped or glued onto the poster. Each new teacher will share his/her personal poster with all the other new teachers in an effort to develop an instant community of peers. This activity allows new teachers to find others with similar interests and to identify those with expertise that can be tapped in the future.

Each new teachers meeting will have assigned seats for the participants. During the first session the new

teachers will sit with new teachers from their building to develop relationships with people they will see every day. During subsequent meetings the new teachers will be seated by grade level to ensure they have a network of teachers to share ideas and establish support. The development of a network for professional support is important. This network will provide the ability to share ideas and discuss common methodologies including teaching strategies. Although the development of this professional network is important, the development of a personal or social network is critical. Each session begins with refreshments to allow new teachers to informally communicate and share experiences. The opportunity to develop a personal network for support is often an afterthought in most formal programs. In the Fort Smith public school new teacher induction program it is viewed as a critical element. The goal is to insure that no new teacher feels isolated or alone. Once sound relationships are developed it becomes less likely that teachers will want to leave their position.

Satisfying mandated requirements for induction and/or licensure

In Arkansas, new teachers are required to take the Praxis III examination in order to receive a standard teaching license. The instructional element of the new teacher induction program is focused on the four domains identified in the Praxis III. The new teachers receive training and support throughout the entire program which will ensure they are successful in the classroom and also prepare them for the evaluation needed to obtain full licensure.

Transmitting the culture of the system to beginning teachers

Early in the new teacher Induction program a number of district office staff members will meet with the new teachers and explain how their jobs impact the education of children and support teachers in the classroom. The superintendent talks to the new teachers about living the vision of the school district. The Director of Elementary Education, Director of Secondary Education, Director of Special Education, Deputy Superintendent, and the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services all explain to the new teachers the responsibilities of their job function and how that function impacts the education of students and supports the vision of the Fort Smith public schools.

During one of the first sessions, the new teachers are released early to meet individually with the school site principal. This meeting allows the new teacher to begin the development of a strong personal relationship with the principal. The principal will explain the policies and

procedures of the school as well as other helpful hints that will insure the new teacher has a smooth first week of school. The relationship which is developed at this initial meeting will provide the new teacher with a clear understanding of the support that they can expect from their school site leader.

A highly popular element of the new teacher induction program is a community tour. The Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services prepares the teachers for this activity by discussing the history of the community, its changing demographics and its neighborhoods. The Fort Smith public schools attempts to develop school communities that are reflective of the individual neighborhoods and support the integrity of each area. The new teachers are then taken by bus on a guided tour that highlights each elementary and high school attendance area while a description of the individual neighborhood is given. It should be noted that this activity has not been employed with regularity as the large size of a new teacher induction class may be too big to fit on one bus.

METHODOLOGY

This case study examined the effectiveness of the Fort Smith public schools new teacher Induction Program by looking at the elements of the current program and matching them against criteria identified in the literature. This case study then looked at teachers who left the district due to migration, personal and family issues, hired as a district administrator and those that left to pursue employment in other professions. The teachers who were excluded from this study were teachers who left due to retirement. This study also identified curriculum used during new teacher induction. This case study also reviewed the end of year evaluations completed by the participants to determine what changes and improvements had been made to the program based upon participant input. Finally, this case study compared the elements of the Fort Smith public schools induction program through a filter of program attributes identified in the literature.

Evaluation

During the past decade, a total of 763 new certified staff members have participated in the new teacher induction program and of these participants, 518 continue to serve in Fort Smith public schools for a retention rate of 68%. A follow-up review of teachers who attended the program was conducted to determine what caused the remaining 32% of new teachers to leave the school district. The following results were discovered:

- i. 1% took an administrative position within the district;
- ii. 14% of the teachers took a teaching position or working in another district; and
- iii. 17% cited family or personal issues.

Of the teachers who cited family or personal issues specific reasons given included; spouse being transferred, staying home with children or staying home

due to illness. Only 4% of teachers cited working conditions and other organizational issues as their reason for leaving teaching. In several cases these teachers were encouraged to pursue careers outside public education.

At the end of each year the new teachers complete a program evaluation to provide feedback for the program administrators. Since the inception of the program adjustments have been made to the program based upon feedback from the participants. Program adjustments have been made to improve the way in which new teachers integrate into the school site culture. The individual meeting with the principal was instituted based on participant feedback. The extensive support in the area of classroom management was built into the program in response to concerns raised by participants. Based on participant evaluations, experienced teachers attend the sessions and share their classroom rules and procedures with small groups of new teachers. The experienced teachers then rotate to the various tables to give the new teachers a wide variety of ideas that they might incorporate. During the early years of the program it was led almost exclusively by district level administrative staff. The end of year survey results concluded that there was a need for instruction from practicing classroom teachers. This feedback has resulted in the use of current classroom teachers providing the bulk of the training sessions. The program has also been modified to include English language learner (ELL) instructional strategies as well as high yield strategies of instruction. The inclusion of the Praxis III instructional material was added to the program to meet the needs of the participants when this became a mandate for full licensure.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fort Smith public school new teacher induction program appears to be effectively based upon teacher retention. Over 50% of new teachers will leave teaching within their first five years and this number is higher in school districts located in high poverty inner city areas (Greiner and Smith, 2006). Yet, in Fort Smith, the retention rate is 68% over a ten year period. This figure becomes even more impressive when follow-up figures are added to show that after ten years, 83% of the teachers in the Fort Smith public school new teacher induction program are still in public education, either teaching in the Fort Smith public schools, working in administration, or serving in another school district. According to learning first, characteristics of highly effective induction programs are equally important in both high and low functioning school districts. These characteristics are very observable and explain why the Fort Smith public school district has such a highly effective new teacher induction program:

(a) Strong administrative support: Effective leadership is critical to creating a supportive staff. Teachers are more productive when they feel that they have a say in decision making at the building level.

(b) Mentoring and coaching: Adequate time and resources should be available to teachers for mentoring. Quality mentoring provides time for observations of the novice teacher and time to provide feedback and reflection.

(c) Working conditions: New teachers should have a reduced workload, so that they have more time for planning, mentoring interaction and professional development. New teachers should not be given placement in areas out of their field, large class sizes, or to many classes to prepare.

(d) Collaboration among teachers: New teachers must have the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and build those learning communities. Teachers must feel a sense of personal connection with their colleagues. Opportunities for teacher-to-teacher interactions, observations and reflections are critical in connecting teachers on a personal level.

(e) Improved hiring practice: This would involve a clear applicant process, more timely hiring decisions and informing teachers of professional development decisions.

(f) School-wide policies: New teachers should have clear and consistent student behavior policies with the support of their administrators. Teachers should be given the opportunity to have input in the schools mission (MSTA, 2007).

The key to a successful induction program begins with the presence of a visionary leader. An excellent leader ensures that new teachers are monitored and receive the ongoing and sustained support so that they are successful (Black, 2004). A high quality leader will ensure all the program elements are in place and being implemented with fidelity.

The program appears to be highly effective in integrating new teachers into their first assignment and in retaining them in the school district. The program also prepares them to continue to serve in public education even though their personal circumstances might change and they end up teaching in another community. The program has also made adjustments based upon participant input to ensure on-going improvement in the effectiveness of the program. This constant evaluation and program adjustment should ensure the program is meeting the changing needs of the participants. It is through this constant adjustment and change that the program will likely become even more effective in the future.

A definition of teacher induction programs was developed by Smith and Ingersoll (2004) in which they divided teacher induction programs into three types. The first type was 'the less than basic induction model' where new teachers received some services but lacked two

important elements - a mentor and supportive communication with administrative leaders. The second type is the 'basic induction' which is defined as a program with a mentor and supportive communication, but lacks all the elements of the highest level. The highest level program is the 'basic+ program' which provides the new teacher with a mentor in the same field or grade level, supportive communication, common planning time and/or regularly scheduled collaboration with their mentor or other teachers and a regularly scheduled seminar for beginning teachers. The Fort Smith new teacher induction program meets the definition of providing the highest level of program for new teachers. It is this comprehensive approach to the program that provides a variety of strategies and opportunities to meet the diverse needs of the participants.

In an effort to improve the program, it is recommended that the data base be expanded to gather more detailed data from teachers who leave the school district. These teachers can give a deeper perspective based upon their new teaching environment, which may lead to program changes and improvements. Attempts should be made to locate teachers who left the district for family or personal issues. It is likely that many within this category left the district for issues of child rearing or other family issues. However, this category is too broad and likely includes teachers who were dissatisfied with their new teacher experience. There need to be a clear identification of those who left teaching because of a lack of success or other factors which could have been positively impacted by the induction program. Dissatisfied teachers feedback may provide the most valuable input to insure constant and targeted program improvement.

It is also recommended that the data base be expanded and more formalized. As identified by Ingersoll (2002) the data collected should include: Program satisfaction, teacher retention, job satisfaction, teacher learning and student impact. A more targeted and comprehensive data collection system will ensure the program continues to meet the needs of all new teachers.

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