Induction and Internship

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One of the most exciting activities for me at the start of each school year is meeting hundreds of new teachers at the Induction program for new teachers to the Board. While it is energizing to sense the enthusiasm and positive anxiety of people beginning their career in teaching it is also frustrating to realize that as a School Board we are not providing the level of support for beginning teachers that we deem necessary. This is a consequence of the reality of the allocation of resources to school boards rather than a lack of desire. What forms of support would be helpful?

In today's culture of consistent change we need to provide new teachers with a collaborative environment involving professional growth and development, accountability, feedback and evaluation.

Our interest as a District School Board is to retain our new teachers, improve their professional performance and to transmit the school system culture and expectations. This is possible through the development and implementation of a "Teacher Mentor Team" program.

With a focus on increased accountability for student performance the major focus of a mentor program would be enhancing teacher's abilities to improve student achievement. To support this goal topics for a mentoring program could include: classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing student's work, relations with parents, organization of class work, planning lessons, relations with colleagues,

effective uses of different teaching methods, report cards, awareness of school policies and procedures.

An effective teacher mentor program would contain the following guiding principles:

- An understanding / belief that teaching is an area of life-long learning.
- Mentor training is a critical component of new teacher retention.
- Mentee selection is based on special requirements and having a mentor is crucial for future success.
- The teacher mentor program is divided into progressive stages of development.
- The mentor team training is oriented towards long-term career goals.
- Mentorship expectations and norms of teacher conduct are clearly articulated.
- Mentees received supervision, coaching demonstration and assessment.
- The mentor team program is organized, consistent and provides continuous feedback among program participants.

A Teacher Mentor Team program would operate under the leadership of a Mentorship coordinator as follows:

- The Mentorship team includes the beginning teacher, the mentor. (peer teacher) and the school principal.
- Mentors receive a stipend and one release day per term.
- A training session would be mandatory for all mentors and voluntary for administrators.
- Beginning teachers are assigned a mentor from their school and division.
- Monthly in-service sessions would be held for Mentees and mentors.

Obviously there are costs associated with the Teacher Mentor

Team Program. A program coordinator is required, release time for in-service and dialogue with mentor, release time for classroom visits and a stipend for mentors all require resourcing.

However, there are also costs associated with low retention rates of teachers and minimal growth opportunities. An interactive system of monitoring would benefit all of the participants: the mentor, the mentee and the school system. New teachers benefit in several ways: fast assimilation into the school environment, the establishment of professional competence, and the introduction to teaching as a continually developing, lifelong career.

A school system that enthusiastically welcomes beginning teachers and initiates them to active participation in the educational process has the potential to reduce teacher attrition rate.

Involving experienced teachers in the program and providing them with the opportunity to pass on their expertise, further demonstrates long-term professional interest in the faculty and provides an environment conducive to life-long professional careers.

A teacher mentor team program is an exciting and worthwhile possibility. Through such a program newcomers into the teaching profession will be welcomed, offered support, given new perspectives and ideas and experience the values and norms of the school district. If we put improvement of practice and performance at the centre of our theory of leadership, then leaders must create conditions that value learning as both an individual and collective good.