

SUCCESSFULLY TRAINING AND RETAINING NEW TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The widespread need to fill the many teacher vacancies in Virginia and the nation as a whole has stirred many debates on how to solve the problem. Often a “quick fix” attitude prevails when considering options for training and retaining teacher candidates to fill the current and future needs of our schools. The professional development model of collaboration between Marymount University and two local school jurisdictions is an ongoing effort that has met with success and has produced long-term positive results.

INTRODUCTION

Editorial sections of newspapers are routinely flooded with debates concerning nationally standardized tests, reduction of class sizes, best practices for teaching math, science, and reading, and other hot topics in the field of elementary education. While these debates rage on, the grim reality that a serious teacher shortage exists in this country lurks in the background.²³⁴ Without teachers to guide children and to implement educational programs, none of these heated debates will matter at all.

Where have all the teachers gone? Many have retired, some have decided to return to or enter careers with more lucrative pay, and others have moved on to administrative positions in the field of education.²³⁵ The challenge now is to attract, train, and retain a new generation of

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234. See generally John I. Goodland, *TEACHERS FOR OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS* (1995).

235. See generally Jeff Archer, *New Teachers Abandon Field at High Rate*, *EDUC. WK.*, Mar. 17, 1999, at 1, available at <http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=27retain.h18&keywords=New%20Teachers%20Abandon%20Field>.

educators ready to face the joys and rigors of teaching in the twenty-first century.

How can we attract new recruits to the field of education? Some possible sources for the recruitment of prospective educators include recent college graduates, career-changers, and retirees.²³⁶ In past years, people without an undergraduate degree in education circumvented many academic roadblocks on the path to certification as a teacher. Today, many creative and alternative paths to teacher certification are offered, clearing those roadblocks to certification.

In addition to the conventional undergraduate education major, universities and school systems now offer opportunities to enter the teaching profession to candidates who have an undergraduate degree in any field. There are programs in Virginia run by school systems that offer provisional teacher certification—a temporary license to teach. These programs train prospective teachers during the summer months and place them as teachers in selected schools in the fall with the support of an assigned mentor who meets with the trainee during the school year.²³⁷ These new teachers are awarded provisional state certification that can only be renewed upon timely completion of education courses and core subject courses required for full state certification.²³⁸

These programs are well intended and do attract prospective teachers. Some critics of the current system of hiring teachers view these new programs as innovative, quick means to fill teacher vacancies.²³⁹ They give us new, enthusiastic teachers, eager to build, along with their students, a foundation of core knowledge. But will a few weeks of summer training and ongoing mentoring be enough to prepare new teachers to successfully educate our children? Are professional educators rushing to meet the teacher shortage at the expense of the best teaching practices?

Many potential candidates possess the fundamental attributes they need to become classroom teachers, and some may have developed a great deal of expertise in their former employment. A few may actually

236. See generally Jay Matthews, *Qualified vs. Certified: Is This Any Way to Hire Teachers?*, WASH. POST, July 22, 1001, at B5.

237. See Arthur E. Wise & Jane Leibbrand, *Profession-Based Accreditation: A Foundation for High-Quality Teaching*, 78 PHI DELTA KAPPAN 202, 203 (1996)

238. See generally Matthews, *supra* note 3, at B5.

239. *Id.*

be “naturals” and need little guidance and mentoring to make their way into the profession. Most candidates, however, need explicit instruction on theory and the methodology of the best teaching and classroom management practices; they need veteran teachers to provide a range of experiences and the instruction necessary to model what works in today’s diverse classrooms.²⁴⁰ Like the students waiting in America’s classrooms, potential educators need the same kind of nurturing and time to learn what works and creates an environment for learning.²⁴¹

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

There are teacher education programs that combine best teaching practices, hands-on learning, continual mentoring, and evaluation, all of which can be completed in one full year. These programs are often called “Professional Development Schools” (PDS) or “Professional Development Academies” (PDA) and offer year-long internships in the art of teaching at a public school.²⁴² This model of teacher education is akin to a medical teaching internship where observing and conferring with experienced practitioners leads to a more thorough understanding and relevance.

In Northern Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools and the Arlington Public Schools work with Marymount University in a collaborative effort to train prospective educators.²⁴³ These PDS and PDA programs consist of a select group of teachers-in-training who, in the course of one academic year, earn a Master of Education degree and full Virginia licensure as a teacher in Pre-Kindergarten through Sixth Grade (PK-6).²⁴⁴ The program is in its eighth year and has provided more than 140 teachers for local jurisdictions.²⁴⁵

Through these innovative graduate-level teacher education programs, interns gain teaching experience with the support and guidance of specially trained master teachers and on-site university supervisors.

240. Jo Ann Daly, *Practice Makes Perfect: A Successful Teacher Education Model*, Address at the Alpha Omicron Chapter of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International (March 2000).

241. Wise & Liebbrand, *supra* note 4, at 204.

242. *Id.*

243. This statement comes from the authors' personal work experience with the public school system and Marymount University.

244. *Id.* The authors are involved in the Professional Development Schools (PDS) and Professional Development Academies (PDA), so they possess first-hand knowledge of how the programs work.

245. *Id.*

Classes taught by Marymount University take place on location at the public schools where the internships occur. Interns gain all field and student teaching experience at their assigned base school.²⁴⁶

This model of teacher training benefits the schools which provide internships in several ways. The most obvious benefit to the school is that by hosting the program, the school's teacher-to-student ratios in the classrooms increase. Interns work with classroom teachers four days a week, across grade levels, for an entire school year. Master teachers mentor and observe the interns, while an on-site program coordinator supervises the internship. Interns receive thorough training in curricular areas, and learn ways to best implement and integrate the Virginia Standards of Learning into their lesson plans.

The use of the PDS/PDA teacher-training model increases opportunities for the professional development of the participating school's faculty. Interns serve as substitute teachers in their schools, releasing teachers to attend full or part-day in-house training. This enables teachers to learn from each other and attend workshops and conferences at their school site during the school day. Interns receive comprehensive year-round training, including a full year of classroom experience and various workshops specifically designed to meet their learning needs. Children also benefit from having two adults in the classroom because this reduces the pupil-teacher ratio and allows for more flexible grouping of students for instruction.

In the PDS/PDA model, interns become professionals who learn from practice.²⁴⁷ The model focuses on the documentation of their teaching and the students' learning. Interns learn to function as reflective practitioners, work collaboratively in learning communities, and demonstrate that their teaching leads to student achievement. When the interns complete the program, they are no longer first-year teachers looking for employment. They possess experience and can face their own classroom with the confidence that the guided, mentored programs provide.²⁴⁸

246. *Id.* The next few paragraphs also reflect the authors' personal experience in teacher training.

247. Ron Coopenhaver & Alice Young, Partnerships: Collaboration or Cooperation/Evolution or Revolution, 10 J. SE. REG'L ASS'N TEACHER EDUC. 5-10 (2001).

248. Alice Young, Initiation Collaboration: A Case Study of the Relationship Between a Teacher Education Center and Two Public School Districts (1995) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale).

CONCLUSION

The country must approach the quest to fill the teaching vacancies in this country's classrooms logically, methodically, and with the best teaching practices in mind.²⁴⁹ Internship programs such as Marymount University's PDS/PDA program consistently produce confident, qualified, sought-after teachers who thoroughly train to understand how children learn best.²⁵⁰ In addition to training in Virginia's PK-6 academic curriculum, interns acquire an understanding of the role of the teacher in accommodating diverse learners, working with parents, and consulting with other colleagues. They develop a repertoire of skills for classroom management, and the capacity to reflect upon their practice and make improvements. These characteristics cannot be fostered in a few weeks time. Year-long internship programs that produce experienced, well-trained teachers provide a means for Virginia and our nation to improve the performance of our children in school. Our children must learn from the best in order to work towards being their best. Schools need teachers who want to stay in teaching.²⁵¹ It is time for Virginia to support the PDA/PDS process and certify successful, effective new teachers-teachers who are qualified because of their experiences in a carefully planned and highly supportive internship program.

249. Hough *et al.*, *The Winds of Change: Charting the Course with the Professional Development Academy*, Presentation made at Towson State University (October 1998).

250. Patty Hohwiesner, *Yearly Status of PDA Interns (2001)* (unpublished internal document, Fairfax County Public Schools).

251. *See generally* Archer, *supra* note 2.

