

INTRODUCTION

Over the next several years, nothing may demand more attention from school officials than the challenge of new teacher retention. The number of new teachers leaving schools is stunning. Nationally, as many as one-third of teachers leave within their first three years; nearly half leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2002; NCTAF, 2003; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999), and attrition rates are even higher in urban schools (Guarino, Santibañez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). The need for more effective retention efforts has never been more urgent. However, current retention efforts commonly undervalue or overlook altogether a pivotal aspect for new teachers: the social-emotional climate in schools. More specifically, research suggests that the ability of new teachers to create a positive social environment in the classroom and the quality of their relationships in school settings with students and other adults, such as administrators and colleagues, significantly shape their work experiences and their decisions about whether to stay in the profession. Improving support for new teachers in these areas holds promise for enhancing both their professional success as well as retention.

The Retention Problem

Poor retention of new teachers has significant, harmful consequences for schools and children. Persistent teacher turnover undermines the consistent implementation of curriculum and instruction and wastes professional development resources (Guin, 2004). Staffing shortages created by high turnover compel schools to hire under-qualified staff, greatly diminishing the educational quality of these schools (SRI International, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Moreover, research strongly suggests that teachers must reach a critical three- to five-year threshold before they achieve job proficiency and significantly impact students' learning outcomes (Kain & Singleton, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Huling, 1998; Ferguson, 1991). Thus,

when new teachers leave early, schools struggle to maintain a cadre of skilled, experienced teachers. Further, poor retention will severely challenge schools as they prepare to meet the growing demand for new teachers resulting from rising student enrollments and the substantial number of teacher retirements anticipated over the next decade (Gerald & Hussar, 1998; NCTAF, 2003).

A New Focus

Recent research on new teacher retention—and, in turn, current retention and school reform efforts—predominantly focuses on factors such as wages and other financial incentives (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993; Murnane & Olson, 1990; Hirsch, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001); the quality and length of teacher preparation (Fowler, 2002; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; NCTAF, 1996, 2003); poor working conditions, such as large schools and class sizes, lack of administrative support, mandated curriculum and testing, and poor facilities (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Norton, 1999; Mont & Rees, 1996; Kaufman, Moster, Trent, & Halloran, 2002; Cochran, 1988; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu & Donaldson, 2004); and participation in induction and mentoring programs (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Important as these factors are to new teachers, a focus on these aspects alone paints an incomplete picture of the retention problem. One element that is largely missing, in both the prevailing retention literature and program efforts, is a full appreciation of how the social-emotional climate in classrooms and schools influences new teachers' attitudes toward work and career decisions. In particular, there is limited consideration of how the ability of new teachers to create a positive social environment in the classroom and to foster positive relationships among students, with students, and with colleagues may influence many new teachers' decisions to

remain in or to leave the classroom. These types of relationships are multifaceted and powerfully shape the work experiences and attitudes of new teachers (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989a; Friedman & Kass, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Relationships in the classroom, for instance, encompass teachers' efforts to establish positive learning climates, respond when students violate behavioral norms, connect with and motivate students, and improve relations among students. Relationships with other adults in school settings include teachers' experiences with the school's professional culture, interactions with colleagues, and the types of support received from administrators and mentors.

In addition to greater awareness about how these relationships impact new teachers, retention efforts would also benefit from expanding the capacity to support new teachers in forming these relationships. In this regard, the emerging field of social and emotional learning (SEL) can potentially provide both valuable insight and concrete strategies for improving the quality of relationships in the classroom and in the school. By promoting the development of core social-emotional competencies among students and by providing demonstrated approaches and strategies, SEL programs have shown promise in enhancing teachers' abilities to foster positive classroom climates, reduce problematic behaviors by students, and form stronger bonds with both students and colleagues (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003).

Beyond the benefit of increased retention, helping new teachers improve relationships among students, with students, and with colleagues would significantly contribute to the academic mission of schools. There is compelling evidence that teachers who relate to students effectively, manage classrooms well, and foster positive, safe learning environments also enhance students' learning outcomes (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004;

CASEL, 2003; Osterman, 2000; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Wilson & Shulha, 1995). Most notably, from their extensive analysis of more than two decades of research on student learning, Wang, Haertel, & Walberg (1994, 1997) found that effective classroom management and positive student-teacher interactions were more highly correlated with student academic success than other variables, be it parental involvement, curriculum, school culture, or school demographics. In terms of adult relationships, research suggests that intensive, ongoing collaboration among colleagues is among the most effective strategies for increasing teacher instructional proficiency and thus student learning gains (Garet, Porter, Desmoine, Birman, & Suk Yoon, 2001; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). In turn, teachers who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to report high job satisfaction and stay in the profession (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985).

Report Overview

This report reviews the research on new teachers with a specific focus on how the social-emotional climate shapes their work experiences and impacts their retention. Section One examines relationships in new teachers' classrooms, reviewing both the prevalence and causes of new teachers' struggles to create a safe and positive environment and to relate to students. Section Two examines new teachers' relationships in school settings with other adults, such as colleagues, administrators, and mentors, and considers how schools foster these relationships and why these relationships are important to new teachers. Section Three reviews current teacher preparation and induction programs that address social-emotional challenges faced by new teachers. This section also includes a review of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs as a potential new source of support for beginning teachers. Finally, Section Four discusses the implications of this report's findings for schools and others concerned with new teacher retention.