

Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

WASHINGTON

Mentoring new teachers raises retention rate dramatically

In 2002, the Lake Washington Education Association and the Lake Washington School District negotiated contract language that provides mentoring and support for all new teachers during their first three years. For financial reasons, the program was shortened to two years in 2010-11. Nonetheless, Lake Washington's **New Teacher Support Program** stands out from other districts' mentoring programs—in part, because it has a staff of eight full-time consulting teachers to support and guide newcomers. They observe new teachers twice in a formal classroom setting and provide feedback before any evaluation by an administrator. Every consulting teacher has many years of leadership experience and has worked in both elementary and secondary schools in the district.

How it works

- Before school opens, teachers new to the district receive a week of orientation and training (with pay) in topics ranging from curriculum to classroom management strategies. They are also released for ongoing training three times the first year.
- Consulting teachers work with new teachers at least once a week in their classrooms, provide feedback, and make suggestions.
- First-year teachers are housed in the main building with colleagues, not portable classrooms.
- Elementary school teachers must have at least two years of teaching experience before they are assigned to a "split" class—for example, a combination of fourth- and fifth-graders.
- Secondary school teachers change classrooms no more than twice a day during their first year and are assigned no more than two courses to prepare during their first two years.

Positive results

- Teacher turnover was high before the introduction of the program. According to a report by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), ten percent of the state's teachers left the profession after the first year and a third after five years.

- In 2010, the Lake Washington School District retained nearly 90 percent of new teachers, compared to 50 percent when the program began.
- New teachers who were reluctant to share challenges with their principal are inclined to be more open with a consulting teacher.
- A Lake Washington teacher says, "I had job offers elsewhere, but I knew I wanted to be here because of the support they offered. It was one of the biggest factors in my coming here, and it will keep me here in the Lake Washington School District."
- In 2005, NEA honored the program with an award for excellence. Only six mentoring programs nationwide received that recognition.

New approach to teacher evaluation

- Lake Washington has completely overhauled its teacher evaluation system.
- The former approach—rating teachers either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory"—has been replaced by a professional growth and development system with four tiers.
- Under the new system, every teacher meets with a support team four times a year (on early-release Wednesdays).

For more information:

Kevin Teeley, president, Lake Washington Education Association, 425-822-3388 (office) or 206-940-1947 (cell)

Video: *New Teachers Talk about Induction*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOWSM2rokdw



Great Public Schools for Every Student