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To teach is to learn.

Japanese Proverb

TEACHERS: COMING AND GOING

A demographic phenomenon called the “sandwich effect” is influencing school faculties across the United States and Canada. The “sandwich effect” is a metaphor that depicts districts with a large number of *senior* staff and an equally large number of *beginning* staff, but with very few teachers falling between the two because of reduction in force policies of the intervening years—thus, the sandwich image of a top tier and a bottom tier.

However, that demographic is about to change quite radically. In fact, the trend is already apparent. Predictions made in 1999 suggest that 2.5 million new teachers will enter the profession during the next ten years. Young people right out of college as well as second career people are being enticed to come into the field to fill the needed positions. Yet, at the same time that these new teachers are entering the field, the “baby boomers” are reaching retirement age. The noticeable exodus of veteran teachers, which has already begun, continues at a steady rate.

To complicate matters even more for schools trying to recruit, orient, and mentor new staff, the statistics on new teacher retention are not very promising. Within the first three or four years, 25% to 30% of beginning teachers leave the ranks of the profession. They simply decide not to stay in the field and make career moves elsewhere. Thus, these desperately needed faculty members are on staff for a very short time. With this situation

coupled with the exodus of seniors, an escalating teacher shortage is just beginning to affect our schools.

Based on these scenarios, schools are frantically recruiting new teachers to meet their faculty needs. In an effort to provide immediate and on-going support for these new recruits, schools often offer new teacher induction programs. By formalizing the structure of the orientation and development of new teachers, schools attempt to keep their newest staff members for the long run.

Often, a significant element in these support programs is the assignment to the beginning teacher of a mentor who provides immediate, consistent, and continual guidance to ensure the success of the novice teacher. However, with the changing demographics, there are already signs that there are too many new teachers and too few mentors.