

# RETAINING NEW TEACHERS

*How do I support and develop  
novice teachers?*

BRYAN  
HARRIS

# RETAINING NEW TEACHERS

*How do I support and develop  
novice teachers?*

Introduction.....	1
The Problem of High Attrition for Early-Career Teachers.....	2
Why New Teachers Leave.....	3
Four Supports That Make a Difference.....	7
Additional Tangible Supports.....	33
Encore.....	37
References .....	43
About the Author .....	46



## Introduction

It's a national disgrace: up to half of all new teachers leave the profession within their first three to five years (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Across the country, thousands of teaching positions are going unfilled or are being filled by less-than-qualified teachers. Why does this teacher shortage persist, and what can we do about it? How would we react, as a nation, if up to half of all *students* dropped out of school at the same rate?

Education leaders must wake up and take action—before we fail an entire generation of teachers and their students. That's where this book comes in. In these pages, I provide specific, practical action points for creating supports and programs that will encourage new teachers to remain in the profession and ensure that they experience success early on. This book is intended for school and district leaders, policy-makers, veteran teachers, and anyone else who has an interest in fostering early-career teachers' success and retention.

## The Problem of High Attrition for Early-Career Teachers

Despite much research (see, for example, Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) on the factors that influence new-teacher retention, attrition rates continue to be frighteningly high. Looking at the annual attrition rates for new teachers in the last two decades, it is hard not to conclude that we have reached the state of a national crisis. There is growing concern among teacher leaders, administrators, and policymakers that, unless we give specific attention to this problem, new teachers will continue to leave at high rates. A profession that does not support its newest recruits cannot stay a viable profession for long.

U.S. public schools are at a critical crossroads. It is estimated that an additional 200,000 teachers will be needed in the next decade because of such factors as the large wave of teacher retirement, an increase in immigration of school-age children, and the rising popularity of class-size reduction initiatives (Graue & Rauscher, 2009; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Compounding the problem is the failure of some states and regions to produce enough college graduates to meet the demand for new teachers. Many school districts attempt to fill these gaps by recruiting new teachers from other states. Unfortunately, these teachers tend to leave the profession at even higher rates than do those who don't make interstate

moves to launch their careers (Harris, 2013). Even more alarming is the fact that some districts are compelled to hire teachers from other *countries*. What does it say about the United States that we can't produce enough qualified teachers to educate our children?

## Why New Teachers Leave

Any discussion of new-teacher attrition must begin with the question *Why do these teachers leave in the first place?* Only after considering the answers to this question will we be able to create programs and supports that will get teachers to stay.

The following list, drawing from the findings of such well-known researchers as Linda Darling-Hammond (2005), Richard Ingersoll (2001), and Michael Strong (2005), highlights some of the major reasons new teachers leave their positions.

- **Relocation or migration.** Plenty of early-career teachers simply move to other schools or districts. Although these teachers stay in the profession, the communities they leave experience teacher attrition. The national trend is that teachers migrate away from higher-poverty communities toward wealthier ones (Ingersoll, 2001).
- **Career change.** Not everyone enters teaching with the plan to make it a lifelong career. Teaching may

end up being only one of several careers a person may have, especially among the Millennial generation. In addition, with the exception of administration, the education profession offers few opportunities for advancement for those who like to change jobs often or take on new challenges (Strong, 2005).

- **Job change or relocation of a spouse, family member, or significant other.** There are times when a teacher wants to stay in his or her current location but must move owing to family obligations.
- **Lifestyle change.** Some teachers leave the profession to make a lifestyle change, such as becoming a full-time parent or taking care of a sick family member.
- **Being counseled out of the profession.** All healthy organizations weed out the poorest-performing employees. Sometimes, despite a school's best efforts to provide support, an individual just does not develop the skills to be an effective teacher. In such cases, it is beneficial to students and to the school for them to move on to different careers.
- **Poor pay and benefits.** Without going into a tangent on school funding and teacher salaries, suffice it to say that it can be challenging to make ends meet on the typical new-teacher pay. Many early-career teachers recently graduated from college, where they were financially sheltered with loans or support from parents. It can be a rude awakening to suddenly bear the full load of their financial obligations, and the realization of just how little they bring home