Nearly two years after he left teaching, Husband lives in Portland, Ore., where he’s studying to become a minister. “My life’s just going to be a lot easier,” he says.

THE PROBLEM

Despite increasing numbers of teachers reaching retirement age, experts believe it is teacher retention that will be the biggest factor in what many are predicting will be a serious teacher shortage. They say efforts to recruit teachers are useful, but more attention must be paid to keeping teachers once they are hired. “There’s nothing wrong with recruiting new teachers in, but if they don’t stay, what’s the point?” says Richard Ingersoll, a University of Georgia sociology professor who has studied schools as workplaces for years.

Ingersoll and others argue that the real problem is not a lack of new teachers jumping into the pool of education, but the big open drain in the bottom. “The problem is retention,” Ingersoll says. “If we could deal with the problem of retention, we wouldn’t have these shortages.

The whole concept of shortages implies there’s a lack of warm bodies. That’s a misnomer. It’s not too few candidates out there. It’s too few candidates staying.”

Husband’s reasons for leaving his teaching job in Montana are typical, Ingersoll says. Besides low pay and lack of support, he says, his research indicates two other leading factors are pushing teachers out of the profession: increased problems with student discipline, which newer teachers feel unprepared to handle, and the top-down management style of many administrators.

These reasons contribute to a devastatingly high rate of departure. National estimates range between 30 and 50 percent of all teachers leaving the profession within their first three to five years of teaching. About three out of every four potential teachers who begin an undergraduate teaching program leave the profession before their fourth year of teaching, according to the report “What Matters Most: Improving Teaching and Learning.”

The report was issued in 1996.
THE PARTNERSHIP: Veteran teachers, with new teachers.

THE PROJECT: Retaining teachers.

“There’s nothing wrong with recruiting new teachers in, but if they don’t stay, what’s the point?” says Richard Ingersoll, a University of Georgia sociology professor.
Programs that help to keep teachers

Some teacher-retention programs have made strides in preparing and retaining new teachers.

1. **RECRUITING NEW TEACHERS, INC.,** a Massachusetts-based nonprofit group, recently released a national study, *Learning the Ropes: Urban Teacher Induction Programs and Practices in the United States.* The study urges school districts to devise induction programs that are multi-year, assisted by trained administrators and mentors, and include evaluations linked to district and state standards. It cites four well-established programs as “quite comprehensive”:
- ✓ Albuquerque, N.M.,
- ✓ Cincinnati, Ohio,
- ✓ Rochester, N.Y.,
- ✓ Jefferson County/Louisville in Kentucky.

All had credential programs that included one-year internships.

2. A 1996 study by the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future lauds similar programs at **TRINITY UNIVERSITY** in San Antonio, Texas and **TEACHERS COLLEGE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**. Both programs are about a decade old, and partner with local schools to provide mentors for teaching interns. Linda Darling-Hammond, the commission’s executive director, says such programs typically produce attrition rates among teachers between five and 10 percent, well below national averages.

Trinity extended its program to a five-year model a decade ago, and partnered with local districts to provide on-campus mentors. Trinity students complete their bachelor’s degree before entering the internship program, which includes a master of arts degree in teaching. The higher degree means better preparation for the classroom and slightly higher pay.

“It’s the smartest and best thing we’ve ever done here,” says John Moore, chairman of Trinity’s education department.

The interns work in schools under nearly constant watch by a combination of university faculty and veteran teachers at the campus, who receive an extra planning period each day to observe and meet individually with interns. The small college typically has about 40 interns matched with about 65 mentors in five nearby public schools.

3. A program called the **NEW TEACHER PROJECT** at the University of California, Santa Cruz, also wins kudos from Darling-Hammond and other educators. This project takes a somewhat different approach: Mentors are released from teaching and instead work full-time for three years with up to 15 beginning teachers. Director Ellen Moir says the New Teacher Project is the oldest of its kind in California, which produces the largest share of new teachers of any state in the country. The two-year program...

by the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF), a 26-member panel of governors, legislators, business and community leaders, and educators. It recommended major reallocation of education spending nationwide, offering a $55 billion blueprint that includes nearly $5 billion to improve recruitment, teacher education, and professional development. Other recommendations included reallocating $40 million from non-teaching functions to classroom teaching, and reallocating $10 billion to restructured compensation programs that reward teacher knowledge and skill.

“It’s very easy to wash out,” says Linda Darling-Hammond, the commission’s executive director. Now the faculty advisor of the teacher education program at Stanford University, Darling-Hammond said new teachers are often overwhelmed by a profession that is demanding for beginners and veterans alike.

Bad management is often to blame, Ingersoll says. New teachers like Husband get the tougher assignments with the most challenging students, sometimes in subjects they are not even certified to teach. Typically, Ingersoll says, these practices come with little support from school administrators, who are repeating the bad management styles they learned from predecessors.

“New teachers are far more often mismanaged than are veteran teachers,” Ingersoll says.

The problem is intensified in inner-city schools, says Fred Frelow, director of the NCTAF’s Urban Initiative. In some schools in the South Bronx and South Brooklyn, he says, up to 70 percent of teachers leave within their first three years on the job. About half of those who remain are uncertified or are teaching subjects out of their fields of study.

“Many schools are simply revolving doors,” he says.

Frelow attributes this to a combination of factors: run-down and overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of teaching materials, a lack of support from...
administrators, and low salaries.

“Teachers don’t feel supported or valued,” he says.

Frelow and Ingersoll both say the problem seems to be worsening, but acknowledge this is opinion and is not based on hard data. They agree that plenty of people are entering teacher education programs, but Frelow adds that too many of them aren’t even entering the profession after being discouraged and/or overwhelmed by their student teaching assignments. “When they find out what it’s like to be in the schools, then they don’t go,” he says.

Frelow and Ingersoll both speak not just from their research, but also from personal experience. Both are former high school teachers who eventually left the classroom. Frelow left after 12 years, in part because the profession offered no new opportunities besides becoming an administrator. Both say they found the new challenges they sought in university settings.

“It’s not a production problem,” agrees Darling-Hammond, who also started her career as a public school teacher. There is no shortage of students graduating from schools of education, although too few are qualified to teach math and science. “We don’t have enough U.S. citizens trained in elementary, secondary, or college science,” she says. As a result, teachers who teach these subjects often are inadequately trained. Such a system perpetuates itself, with fewer and fewer students being inspired to enter these fields.

**KEEPING TEACHERS**

Ingersoll, Frelow, and Darling-Hammond all say America’s schools must make some fundamental changes to stem the loss of new teachers. Their specific recommendations are not identical, but follow a common theme.

First, there’s higher salaries for teachers. Darling-Hammond says only 36 percent of education spending goes to teacher salaries nationwide, compared to between 60 to 80 percent in other modern

The program really begins once teachers are credentialed – whether or not they graduated from UCSC’s five-year program – and hired in one of the 16 partnering school districts surrounding the university.

The program helps beginning teachers move beyond what they learned during their credential programs, and results in a master’s degree in education upon completion. “The truth is that teaching . . . is complex, and there are many challenges we face,” Moir says. “A new teacher isn’t prepared, no matter how good your student teaching program. No matter how well-prepared, they’re not ready for the challenges of running their own classrooms.”

The New Teacher Project costs $5,300 per teacher per year, with $2,100 paid by the district and $3,200 by the state. This doesn’t include a portion of the mentor teacher’s salary and benefits, which are paid by the state’s Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program.

Moir says experienced teachers work with their new colleagues for two years, doing demonstration lessons, performing observations and assessments, helping mediate situations with parents and administrators, and providing emotional support. These mentor teachers receive several days of training in foundations of mentoring, coaching, and observing before they become mentors. During their two- to three-year stints as mentors, they meet together for three hours each Friday to get additional training and to share their experiences.

The program boasts retention rates that Moir calls “outrageously high.” In a study of teachers who entered the program in 1992, 95 percent are still in education and 92 percent are still teaching. As a result, the program has been recognized by the California Council on the Education of Teachers.

“Finally, the nation is seeing that a preservice credential program just isn’t enough,” Moir says. “Like other professions, you need an internship and a support model.”

The New Teacher Project is working with about 450 novice teachers and 35 mentor/veterans, and has worked with nearly 2,000 teachers since it began. Moir says the program has also benefited veteran teachers, whose careers have been revitalized by sharing their knowledge and experience with novice teachers. Principals in the partner schools have told her that the novices quickly begin to look like third-year teachers, moving more quickly past issues of classroom control, for example, to address significant teaching issues such as assessing their own performance, becoming more responsive to student needs, and how to work with struggling readers.

“I haven’t been as excited about something in my own profession, ever,” Moir says. “That’s what needs to happen in the education profession. We all need to recommit to it and build a new kind of teacher: someone who’s a great problem solver, who’s a good leader ... Nothing matters more than a quality teacher. I’m glad the country is waking up to this.”
countries. In the 1950s, she says, over 50 percent of district employees were teachers, whose salaries accounted for 52 percent of spending. Those numbers have dropped to 36 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

“We tend to spend a lot more money on people who are in non-teaching jobs than most other countries do,” she says. In part this is because state and federal categorical programs have swelled clerical staffs during the past 40 years. Also, school districts — especially large suburban ones — have instead put money into big buildings, such as big sports facilities and swimming pools.

But higher salaries are just the beginning. Ingersoll says his research also points to a need for better support from school administrators, a reduction in student discipline problems, and increased opportunities for faculty input into decision making. Better support from administrators, he says, will help make the other two possible. In the top-down management style typical in schools, Ingersoll says, “a lot rides on the principal. Do they do things that make schools orderly?”

Backing up teachers’ handling of discipline problems — when teachers have followed school rules and policies — is particularly crucial, Ingersoll says. Suppose, for example, a teacher gives a referral to a student causing problems in the classroom, and the administrator doesn’t follow through with the punishment called for by school policy. When students learn their actions don’t have consequences, Ingersoll says, administrators can actually make discipline problems worse for teachers.

Ingersoll suggests some basic common sense tactics can work as a preventive measure. He cites another example of bad school management he encountered during a field study at a Philadelphia high school. School administrators handed down a no-hat rule on campus one day, without consulting with teachers. “Teachers quickly divided,” he says. “Some agreed with the rule, and enforced it. Some agreed and didn’t enforce it. Some disagreed and didn’t enforce it.” Students soon saw there was no consensus and took advantage of the misstep, which in turn widened the schism between teachers and administrators. Ingersoll says administrators could have avoided the flare-up by including teachers in making decisions that directly affect them.

Darling-Hammond advises district leaders to take a good, long look at what they are doing, with an eye toward how they manage teachers. She says providing more planning time for teachers, both
Mentors must be exceptional teachers who are given released time from their own teaching jobs in order to work with beginners. The mentor relationship is too important to be squeezed into the margins of an already busy workday.

individually and with other teachers in the same field, is a vital step. “That makes a huge difference in how people feel about being in a school,” she says, whether they are new or veteran teachers.

Providing experienced mentor teachers for beginners is also key, according to Ingersoll, Darling-Hammond, and Frelow. However, mentors must be exceptional teachers who are given released time from their own teaching jobs in order to work with beginners. The mentor relationship is too important to be squeezed into the margins of an already busy workday. What’s more, Frelow cautions, “you can’t just assign any mentor. You need someone who’s highly trained in the (beginner’s) field.”

Schools also could reap great benefits from a district partnership with a university education program, preferably one with a credential program that includes a yearlong teaching internship. “(Teachers) are prepared in ways that are more responsive to the districts,” Darling-Hammond says, “and it creates a pipeline for them right into these districts.” She advises district officials to “work intensively with local colleges and universities to make sure they are preparing people, then get the pipeline greased so those people can get hired early.” She says large districts are often so cumbersome, they are not hiring their own good interns before other offers are accepted.

The benefits go beyond better trained teachers. “There’s pretty substantial evidence now that better trained teachers ... stay (in teaching) at higher rates,” Darling-Hammond says. A study she performed recently found that of 100 teachers who went through a five-year college program, which included a one-year internship, 90 entered the profession and 85 were still in teaching after three years. Of 100 teachers who graduated from a regular four-year program, on the other hand, only 70 entered the profession and only 50 were still teaching three years later.

In the more common four-year program, Darling-Hammond says, teachers are just getting the hang of teaching when their 10- or 12-week internship ends. With a yearlong, full-time internship, “people become more proficient, more confident. They’re able to use more sophisticated strategies.” Also, she says, universities with a one-year internship typically weave in additional college course work at the same time. “If people learn these (strategies and theories) while they are practicing, they’ll be much more likely to understand how they apply.”

Such programs also could improve the quality of math and science teaching, and help alleviate teacher shortages in both fields. Darling-Hammond says districts need to subsidize continued college course work for teachers who will teach these disciplines, and match them with mentors in the same subjects. Making a significant dent in this problem may take a return to something like the federal subsidy program offered by the National Science Foundation in the 1950s and 1960s, which offered scholarships for preparing new teachers and for professional development opportunities for existing teachers. “It’s something districts can make a dent in,” she says, “but they need help.”