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Newest colleagues need our help

The past few weeks have likely been nothing short of a whirlwind for thousands of new teachers across our country beginning what has the potential to be an amazing career. They've headed into new schools carrying a sense of enthusiasm that will be tough for us old-timers to match!

I always love watching new teachers, because despite having to work far harder than expected, they're typically one big smile — proudly wearing school colors, carefully writing on boards, and often changing their desk arrangements time and again. They won't sleep for days due to a wicked combination of emotions and excitement, but welcoming students for the first time makes everything worthwhile.

Yet despite all of this effort and energy, statistics show that more than 30% of these new teachers will be gone within three years, and 50% will be gone within five.

The numbers are shocking to some. It's hard to imagine the same excited, energetic, new faces losing their smiles so quickly. But those of us who have survived in this field are not surprised. We understand how incredibly demanding this profession really is — and we've seen new teachers leave over and over again.

What should be shocking are the costs attached to such significant turnover. America's schools spend \$2.6 billion every year to address teacher attrition. But the costs are more than just economic.

Teaching is not a profession that most can

master while in college, and knowledge of content is not enough to make one "highly qualified." Accomplished teachers have a deep understanding of the ways that students learn content and the ability to present lessons using varied instructional approaches. Developing this craft knowledge takes significant time and experience.



Every year that teachers put under their belt is critical. Over time, they become more adept and efficient at addressing learning disabilities and tailoring instruction to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Over time, they become more confident and comfortable with their own strengths and weaknesses. Over time, they move beyond the walls of their own classrooms and influence instruction across their schools and districts.

Over time.

The challenge in developing veteran, qualified teachers is that the clock starts ticking from day one. Each school day brings barriers that can seem insurmountable to that new teacher, and dissatisfaction can set in before expertise can develop. Often working in isolation, novice practitioners end up feeling frustrated and alone.

Then a more experienced peer takes the time to reach out, lending support and encouragement. Mentoring either formally or informally, they share what they've learned, learn as they share, and make teaching seem slightly more manageable.

Retention really isn't a complicated puzzle. It just relies on our ability to show compassion to — and concern for — our newest colleagues. ♦

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Join the conversation with Bill by visiting www.nsd.org/blog/ and offering your opinion. Bill posts his provocative ideas frequently — be sure to return often.