

Viva Saskatchewan! Improving school district teacher induction programs in the Katrina states by stealing ideas from our international neighbors

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Abstract

This paper focuses on analyzing the organization of teacher induction programs in Prairie Valley School District in Saskatchewan, Canada, with school districts in Northwest Louisiana and Eastern & Central Mississippi. A look at different agendas of teacher induction programs in school districts in the identified geographic areas and how induction programs affect the recruitment, selection and retaining of teachers in those areas. In producing this paper, the following criteria for determining my sources will be discussed: (a) A review of induction programs at Prairie Valley School District in Regina, SK, Canada (b) A review of the differences in induction programs in Louisiana and Mississippi compared to Prairie Valley (c) Advantages of Prairie Valley's Organizational techniques (d) Comparison of Prairie Valley's Induction Efforts with efforts made in Northwest Louisiana and East/Central Mississippi (e) future studies. Information from Mississippi and Louisiana was collected through surveys of Educational Leadership students at Mississippi State University at Meridian and Northwestern State University of Louisiana during the 2006-2007 school year. These students were teachers at school districts in East/Central Mississippi and/or Northwestern Louisiana. Information on the organization of induction program at Prairie Valley School District in Regina, SK, Canada, was sent to the primary investigator by Jim Chell of Prairie Valley School District. This information was studied as a means to help improve induction efforts in school districts.

Keywords: teacher, induction, leadership, orientation, retention, recruitment

Introduction

PURPOSE OF TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMS

What Makes a Good Induction Program?

The intent of all induction programs is to transform a student teacher graduate into a competent career teacher. Schlechty (1985) suggests that signs of effective induction programs can be observed in the faculty and administration attitude and behavior: support of school norms and the general conformity of teacher performance to those norms. He presents a framework for evaluation of induction programs which can be translated into a checklist of eight program qualities. His framework is intended to apply to induction programs of vastly differing content and delivery structures. Four program characteristics show the influence of other professions: 1. The program explains to the inductees that the process of their selection is based on special requirements and that induction training is crucial to their future success. 2. The induction process is divided into progressive stages of achievement. 3. The program cultivates mutual support within peer groups. 4. The training is oriented toward long-term career goals. The remaining characteristics apply directly to the needs of beginning teachers: 5. Administratively-set expectations and norms of teacher conduct are clearly articulated and disseminated. 6. Teachers must assimilate a professional vocabulary. 7. New teachers receive supervision, coaching, demonstration, and assessment. 8. The responsibility for supervision should be distributed throughout the faculty in a tightly organized, consistent, and continuous program.

Foster (1982) and Griffin (1985) emphasize the importance of specifying program objectives in behavioral terminology and the necessity for continuous feedback among program participants. Griffin further cautions program developers on the inappropriate use of research results as definitions for expected teacher behavior. Program objectives should be concretely stated expectations of teacher behavior which reflect specific school standards.

Several references point out that induction programs should contain three information sources: the community, the school, and the teaching profession. All must be introduced to the beginning teacher, with emphasis on teaching as an area of life-long learning (Hall 1982). Special needs programs (e.g., those which introduce the new teacher into a rural or urban environment with which the teacher has had no previous experience) most often use this approach (Defino and Hoffman 1984).

What Areas Should Induction Programs Cover?

There is no shortage of proposals for program content (Griffin and Hukill 1983; Galvez-Hjornevik 1985; Zimpher 1985). Topics of importance are usually taken from surveys of senior teachers and administrators experienced in the evaluation of shortcomings of first-year teachers. To vastly varying degrees, all programs contain elements of faculty and facility introduction, classroom management, student discipline, professional conduct, school and school district expectations, and professional obligations. A new teacher needs to be exposed to a variety of teaching techniques and evaluation processes. Some programs equally instruct and assess the beginning teacher; others emphasize assistance to the teacher rather than using the program as an indicator of the beginner's competency. Crucial problems arise when evaluation is mistaken for assessment and induction programs are used as wash-out programs. Schlechty (1985) emphasizes

that new hires in any field are hired with the expectation that they will "survive" the induction process and start on their way to full-term careers.

HOW DO INDUCTION PROGRAMS WORK?

The development and implementation of a wide variety of induction programs is well-documented, including descriptions of their delivery systems. Like the terms "induction" and "internship," many elements and intents of teacher induction programs are borrowed from other professions. Business and medicine is the most common (Galvez-Hjornevik 1985; Schlechty et al. 1984). Some are based on academic induction, such as formal seminars and informal workshops on the system and what is expected of the beginning teacher. Teacher induction started from the introductory lecture and, in some school systems, has evolved into sophisticated multipurpose programs. (For a summary of programs and references, see the ERIC Digest on Current Developments in Teacher Induction Programs.) The following are brief descriptions of some of the most prevalent induction program components.

Internship Status.

Beginning teachers enter as teaching interns, often at reduced salary. The intern combines full teaching responsibility (albeit at reduced class loads) with academic studies. These programs may lead to a master's degree, an advanced level of certification, a higher rung on a career ladder or a fully qualified teaching certificate after one to three years of program participation (Defino and Hoffman 1984).

The Mentor

Beginning teachers are assigned to a senior teacher in their area. The senior teacher supplies information, and oversees the maturation of the beginner's teaching and classroom management skills daily. Continuous helping contact between the beginner and the senior teacher (theoretically) provides the support and problem-solving resources for expedient teacher development. (For more bibliographic information, see the ERIC Digest on Teacher Mentoring.)

The Committee. Beginning teachers are each assigned to an induction committee. The committee is a professional development team designed to supervise, provide information to and train the beginning teacher in school-approved classroom techniques and procedures. The committee usually consists of the school principal, a consultant on curriculum and instruction, and a peer teacher, the latter often as a mentor. The administrators are responsible for instruction, assessment, and evaluation; the peer teacher provides daily guidance and program continuity. Often the duties of the peer teacher include evaluation as well as helping the new teacher adjust to the professional environment (Defino and Hoffman 1984; Schlechty et al. 1984).

The Committee, Plus or Minus. In some programs the induction committee serves not one inductee but many. In other programs the committee is supported by a separate group of trained evaluators, which removes the onus of evaluation from the committee/inductee relationship (California State Department of Education 1983; Galvez-Hjornevik 1985). Other forms of the committee include department-based team teaching and interdepartmental teacher coaching. These programs of teachers-helping-teachers are not restricted to benefit beginners but are also applicable to developing the skills of experienced teachers.

Orientation Seminars

The seminar is used to instruct inductees on subjects that the administration deems important, issues that peer teachers have found essential or helpful and concerns expressed by the participating inductees. It is almost never the sole component of an induction program. Seminars may be a support group for all program participants. More sophisticated programs address each group's concerns directly by providing separate seminars for inductees, peer teachers, school administrators and consultants (Foster 1982; Galvez-Hjornevik 1985). Experts' opinions of what ought to constitute an induction program are based on existing programs in nonteaching professions and proposed programs which address documented areas of beginning teachers' needs. Not all induction concerns of other professions transfer to the education profession. Not all proposed solutions will work. Future analysis of programs in existence will reveal what induction formats work and which need to be replaced with other techniques.

The above components are hardly a complete listing of possible induction approaches, nor have all combinations of these formats been tried in existing programs. In spite of twenty years of professional concern with the initiation of new teachers into their working environments, much more work needs to be done in developing good programs and many schools have yet to implement any teacher induction program beyond the pre-Labor Day welcoming speech (“Components of Good Teacher Induction”, 1986).

PRAIRIE VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Induction programs materials, agendas and professional development plans were reviewed from Prairie Valley School District, in Regina, SK, Canada. After review, it's clear that organization and clarity is very important issues to the staff and faculty of Prairie Valley SD. The induction program is not called an “induction program”. The program is called “Teacher Enhancement And Mentorship”. The abbreviation for this program is T.E.A.M. The teachers in Prairie Valley receive a thorough overview of the TEAM process.

Overview of Team Categories:

Who

Prairie Valley School District communicates to everyone involved who is to be involved with the “TEAM” effort. This is spelled out formally. Examples of this include, “All teachers with less than 5 years of experience are expected to participate”, and “Teachers new to PVSD with more than five years of experience have the option to participate; assignment of mentor at the discretion of the administrator”.

What

The Prairie Valley School District clearly communicates the purpose of this “TEAM” Program (Induction Program) to its staff. The purpose of the TEAM effort at Prairie Valley includes mentorship, support, acculturation, and networking opportunities for its teachers and staff.

Where/When

Prairie Valley's induction program (TEAM) does not stop after professional development days at the beginning of each semester like some school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi do. TEAM programs on mentoring, teacher support, culture, and networking continues throughout the school year. (When is TBA)

Why

Prairie Valley communicates to all district staff by explaining the process with TEAM flyers that are e-mailed to all employees. These flyers explain the purpose of why the induction program is a part of the school districts professional development process. Here are some of the reasons the school district gives:

- Support professional and personal growth through continuous and individualized support, advice, and direction and thus enable the success of new teachers
- Teacher retainment and effective transition
- Reduce possible feelings of isolation, being overwhelmed and of failure while affirming feelings and experiences of new teachers.

Administrative Role

School Administrators at the Prairie Valley School District understand their purpose and role in the TEAM Program. Like teachers, they are a vital part of the TEAM effort. Two roles that are identified as duties of the administrators in the TEAM flyer include:

- Identify and match new teacher mentors; ensuring mentors are willing, and have at least five years of teaching experience (preferably at current school), and are interested in leadership
- Enable and expect TEAM session attendance

Other

On the Prairie Valley's TEAM Flyer, several quotes and statistics are listed. One statistic includes that one out of three teachers will leave the profession within the first three years. The TEAM flyer also mentions that teachers that are mentored have a higher retention rate than those that aren't. All of this information can be found in Harry Wong's book, "The first few days of school". Positive Quotes from Wong and are also listed on the flyer.

Characteristics and Role of Mentor

Prairie Valley School District clearly identifies the role of mentor. Faculty and staff aren't left to come up with their own definition for mentor. The school district identifies the characteristics and role of mentors.

Characteristics of a Mentor:

- Has at least 5 years of teaching experience
- Communicates well
- Is professional
- Is patient, empathetic, and a good listener
- Has good rapport
- Is enthusiastic towards teaching
- Is willing to invest time as a mentor
- Is a reflective practitioner
- Models leadership and learning in life
- Is supportive of professional growth

Role of Mentor:

- Provide protégé with individualized support
- Acculturate protégé with Prairie Valley SD and school based procedures, policies and expectations
- Provide protégé with the opportunity to network and develop collegial relationships
- Participate in TEAM mentor/protégé professional learning activities
- Collaborate with protégé and curriculum and learning TEAM consultants
- Learn and grow professionally and personally with protégé
 - Assume role of instructional leader

Time Line

While the time line will be within the school year, Prairie School District identifies specific dates for TEAM sessions throughout the year. These dates are released to teachers prior to the school year starting. The district wants teachers to understand the importance of this year long induction program and is proactive in getting them prepared for it. Topics covered include: TEAM Overview, First Days of School, Assessment and Evaluation, Mentor Orientation, Technology Licenses, Participant Directed Topics, Communication, and working with Challenging Students just to name a few.

In addition, a three page “overview/timeline” schedule is given to every teacher. Through this timeline, the teachers understand the process (purpose/support/rapport w/presenters) with a more detailed analysis of TEAM events.

The teachers appreciate being given reasons why these events are taking place which typically makes them feel valued. Here are some reasons that Prairie Valley School District Teachers feel like stakeholders:

- Teachers are given specific reasons why each induction activity is taking place. This includes the purpose, process, and planned outcome.
- The budget is broken down for them understand the costs of TEAM and cost for mentor pay. All budget related cost are made available to the teachers.

- Teachers understand how the TEAM approach will be evaluated and take the process as a life learning event.

Selected Louisiana and Mississippi school districts: What do they focus on?

- Recruiting Teachers & Teacher Shortage
- Improving Retention Rates/ Retaining Quality Teachers
- Problems with first year teachers
- Short Induction Programs due to Budget
- More Administrative Support

Recruiting Teachers & Teacher Shortage in Louisiana and Mississippi compared to Prairie Valley School District:

Tom Chell of Prairie Valley School District quotes, “One of the issues at Prairie Valley School District isn’t working on teacher recruitment; it’s the fact that teachers love their jobs and do not want to retire.” Teacher recruitment is not a problem at Prairie Valley School District. According to Tom Chell, the district has an over abundance of certified teachers. Many of them have to go to the U.S. in order to find teaching opportunities.

This is the total opposite in Mississippi and Louisiana. The school districts and constantly recruiting certified teachers and most administrators begin the school year with this search. It’s a continuous process. The state of Mississippi has the most aggressive recruiting efforts to help school districts. This effort includes:

- Recruiting teachers to stay a four-year term in a district shortage area
- Paying up \$6,000 stipend for teachers to purchase homes in the district that they are hired in.
- Offering a tuition-free MS/EdS opportunity to public universities in Mississippi.
- Pay off student loans (about ¼ a year)

Louisiana primarily leaves the recruitment efforts up to the local school districts.

Data Collection

Although Louisiana and Mississippi have recruiting efforts that are ongoing, this problem is a nationwide issue. Teachers at selected Louisiana and Mississippi school districts were surveyed in this study. Below are reasons cited by certified teachers in these states for problems recruiting teachers:

- Lack of proper Administrative support
- Lack of appropriate Mentoring. Mentors were assigned, but more of an as-needed basis.
- Poor salaries. Mississippi ranks #41 in salaries and Louisiana ranks #45. <http://www.nea.org/edstats/images/07rankings.pdf>

- Decisions are made only by administration; Not much input from stakeholders
- An analysis or understanding of the purpose of the induction programs are not clear.

What Teachers want from Administrators in regards to induction programs:

A common theme by students at both universities was to have strong administrative support. If a new teacher feels that the administrator is supportive, it is believed by these students that more than likely teachers will stay at this school and/or in the profession. Here are some suggestions teachers in Louisiana and Mississippi have for administrative involvement with teacher induction programs:

- Lead an icebreaker activity
- Principal introduces teachers at first campus meeting and tells a little bit about that person. Formal introductions help the teachers to feel welcome.
- After meeting with all faculty, principal focuses on new teachers and gives them a tour of campus. This helps to build a connection with principal.
- Principal and new teachers discuss the school's mission, vision, and goals.
- Grading, safety, and discipline policies will be discussed (may carry over from initial meeting(s))
- New teachers are assigned mentors by principal.
- Discussion of benefits
- Discussion of district policies
- Classroom management and discipline
- Ordering classroom supplies
- Administrator forms a positive relationship with each staff/faculty

Topics that may include ALL teachers such as SPED laws, new district policies, etc., will be discussed in general faculty meetings. Administrative meetings with new teachers will be more specific. This may include:

- Staff Manuals
- Playground and Cafeteria Tour
- Photocopiers
- Textbooks
- School Calendar
- Keys/Security
- General Schedules
- Homework Policy
- Report Cards
- Attendance/Absentee Procedures
- Team meetings
- Fire Drills/Emergency Procedures
- Lockers
- Daily school Routines

- Open House
- Bus Routines
- Contacting Parents
- Duty

Time Frames

The big difference between induction programs in Regina, Saskatchewan, and selected school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi was the time frame. Average induction days for teachers in Mississippi/Louisiana were 2-2.5 days. Average induction days for teachers in Prairie Valley School District in Regina, Saskatchewan were 10 days. Prairie Valley spends about 4-5 times more time on induction programs than do selected districts in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Teacher Retention

Teachers in Saskatchewan for the most part do not want to leave the classroom according to Tim Shell of Prairie Valley School District. Most new teachers compete for a very small amount of jobs in Saskatchewan and typically end up moving to the states or other provinces in order to begin their teaching career. Could teacher induction programs in this Canada province be a strong reason why teachers do not want to leave the classroom? It's very possible. In Louisiana and Mississippi, 15-20% of new teachers leave within the first year. 40-50% leaves after seven years. Suggestions for improving Induction Programs from teachers that are graduate students at Mississippi State University-Meridian and Northwestern State University of Louisiana:

Talk about Goals

In collecting information from students at both universities, some common findings were discovered:

1. Discuss the purpose of induction programs (Get it out there. Why are we doing this??)
 - a. Transition as a professional
 - b. Training for classroom effectiveness (discussion, role playing)
2. Goals for Induction programs:
 - a. Support and assist new teaching in the transition from college through his/her first year of teaching
 - b. Support and assist the veteran teacher in the transition from his/her previous school
3. Induction Objectives:
 - a. Allow teachers to come up with some objectives (aloud, or suggestion box, collection of suggestions)
 - b. Support and encouragement to help new teachers develop and maintain commitment to teaching long-term
 - c. Provide appropriate educational experiences or professional development for teachers

- d. Orient the new teachers in both the work place and culture of the school community
- e. Provide experienced-caring mentors for support
- f. Help beginning teachers plan for first days of school
- g. Help beginning teachers improve classroom teaching and management

What selected school districts in Mississippi and Louisiana can learn from Prairie Valley School District?:

- Short induction programs (2-2.5 day's average) may not be beneficial in the long-run.
- Longer Induction Programs (10 days average) may improve teacher retention:
 - Currently, Prairie Valley has difficulty getting teachers to actually retire
 - Young teachers have to migrate to other provinces or to the United States to find teaching opportunities
 - Teachers actually like their jobs and feel like professionals with respect from the administration, and other stakeholders.

Future Studies to consider:

Prairie Valley School District (Saskatchewan):

- Does Longer Induction Programs and strong teacher support result in retaining teachers?
- What other issues encourage teachers to work longer than normal?

Selected school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi:

- Could stronger induction programs result in retaining quality teachers?
- What other issues encourage teachers to work passed retirement eligibility?

Belief in Induction Programs as a method to retain quality teachers:

It is believed by this investigator that induction programs play an important role in the retaining of teachers. This investigator plans to research this issue further with a more detailed analysis of induction programs in Prairie Valley School District and selected school district in Louisiana and Mississippi.

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