

NWP Launches New-Teacher Initiative

BY MARCI RESNICK

Over 200,000 new teachers begin work in America's schools each year. Many enter the profession through traditional teacher education programs; others, as the teacher shortage crisis grows, come in through a variety of alternatives. New teachers are more likely to be placed in schools with the most problems and the fewest resources. Even in the most difficult environments, they are expected to perform at the same level as a teacher with 20 years of experience.

Many of these new teachers are unprepared, exhausted, overwhelmed, disillusioned, underpaid, and isolated. According to a report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, one in five new teachers leaves teaching within her first three years in a classroom (Hussar, 1999). Another study, by Darling-Hammond and Schlan, finds that in urban districts, one in two teachers leaves within the first five years.

To address this dangerous epidemic, the National Writing Project is embarking on a new

area of work that focuses on supporting local writing project sites' work with teachers who have less than three years of experience. Project directors across the country are being asked by Inverness Research Associates to supply data that will help the NWP network respond effectively in developing programs to support new teachers in many ways, including in the teaching of writing.

The first phase of this work, supported in part by a grant from the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, will focus on reaching out to novice teachers in urban schools, particularly in schools identified as low performing. At the end of September, eight urban sites will be selected through a proposal process to participate in the NWP New-Teacher Initiative. Each will be awarded \$10,000 to develop new programs or build on existing programs for new teachers in their service areas. This initiative is expected to expand across the entire NWP network beginning next year.

NWP believes it is vitally important to address the issues embedded in working with new teachers for both the growth of the teaching

profession and for the health of writing projects. We know that despite all of the obstacles, the majority of new teachers have a passion for teaching. Succeeding in the classroom, making a difference with students, and working in a professional environment count for a great deal. We also know that support for new teachers that is ongoing, practical, and meaningful makes a difference. In cases where new teachers have access to such support, fewer leave the profession and those who stay feel less overwhelmed and frustrated. NWP's goal is to work with neophyte teachers as they learn.

References

- Hussar, W. J. 1999. *Predicting the Need for Newly Hired Teachers in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Darling-Hammond, L., and E.M. Sclan. 1996. "Who Teaches and Why." In Sikula, J., ed. *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, 2nd Edition*. New York: Macmillan Press.

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