

## Early-Career Teachers Present Research about Teacher Retention

March 29, 2018

Three early-career teachers, along with Vicki Collet, a University of Arkansas assistant professor of childhood education, presented their research on teacher retention March 16 at the National Writing Project spring meeting in Washington.

Their presentation was the culmination of a 2.5-year project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The purpose of the project was to keep early-career teachers in the profession.

Jean Hill of Sonora Middle School in Springdale, Kathryn Hill of Bentonville West High School and Kristina Packard of Elm Tree Elementary School in

Bentonville were part of the study addressing the problem that teacher attrition in Arkansas during the first five years is 30 to 40 percent, a statistic that is mirrored nationwide.

In addition to looking at existing research about teacher retention, the study included a root-cause analysis of issues facing teachers in Northwest Arkansas.

"We wanted to involve as many perspectives as possible and include a wide variety of voices in this process, including those at risk for leaving the profession," Collet said.

High rates of teacher attrition are problematic because this creates a deficit of experienced teachers and a revolving door of less-experienced teachers working with students. To stop this revolving door, the #StayinTeaching project identified three important needs for early-career teachers: Professional learning, networking, and mentoring.



Photo Submitted

*Kathryn Hill, from left, Vicki Collet, Kristina Packard and Jean Hill presented research at the spring meeting of the National Writing Project.*

The study found that professional learning should be focused on best practices that can be implemented in the classroom rather than on a lock-step curriculum and should build upon and extend learning from teacher-preparation programs. Early-career teachers also need networking, both with other early-career teachers and with more veteran teachers.

The need for authentic mentoring was also identified as important for early-career teachers. The study found that mentoring can grow and extend from networking experiences. Further, the study found that effective mentoring is authentic, relationship-based, and not focused on fulfilling mandated, prescriptive requirements.

To begin meeting these needs, the #StayinTeaching project created events that targeted early-career teachers. These included virtual events that were quick and accessible, using venues that early-career teachers were predisposed to such as Google Hangouts, Twitter chats, Facebook, and podcasts. But, more traditional meetings were included as well, because early-career teacher also described a need for face-to-face interactions. In a variety of ways, the #StayinTeaching project addressed needs identified through their study.

Because opportunities for meaningful professional learning were identified as key to teacher retention, the #StayinTeaching presenters took advantage of their time at the conference in Washington to approach representatives at the Capitol about the importance of funding such work. They met with Sen. John Boozman and representatives from the offices of Sen. Tom Cotton and Rep. Steve Womack and described how professional development experiences had supported them and improved their instruction.

In addition to describing her own professional learning, Kathryn Hill described how her work with #StayinTeaching had empowered her to help others stay in the profession.

"I had ideas for how I could reach out to other early-career teachers at my school who were experiencing burnout," she said.

The #StayinTeaching project has worked to support teachers when they need it most — in their first years of teaching. The project organizers hope to expand their impact through social media (@StayinTeaching, #StayinTeaching on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) and through ongoing events.

Collet, who directed the project, is associate director of the Northwest Arkansas Writing Project in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the College of Education and Health Professions. Collet can be reached for questions about the #StayinTeaching at [collet@uark.edu](mailto:collet@uark.edu).

URL: <https://news.uark.edu/articles/41417/early-career-teachers-present-research-about-teacher-retention>