

The Special EDGE

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A Possible Dream

Retaining California's Special Education Teachers

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By Ken Futernick, Director, K-12 Studies, Center for Teacher Quality, California State University, Sacramento

On April 26, 2007, the Center for Teacher Quality released a report I had written on teacher retention in California: *A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Learn*. When I set out to gather data for the report in 2005, my aim was to gain a better understanding of the factors affecting staffing patterns in California's K-12 public schools. Unless policymakers, educators, and researchers really understood why so many teachers were leaving the profession before they retired, why many were transferring away from certain types of schools or assignments, and especially why many chose to stay where they were, it would be difficult to develop and adopt policies and practices that would address

and solve the retention problem. If the state could find a way to retain more of its qualified and experienced teachers, it could significantly and positively affect student learning.

Before conducting a survey for the report, I knew that, in 2005, 14 percent of special education teachers in California's public schools did not have an appropriate teaching credential and that nearly half of first-year special education teachers were under-qualified. It was clear that the status of these professionals needed to be a significant part of the study. With guidance from special education teachers, I included in the survey several questions that specifically addressed their circumstances.

Over 1,000 survey responses from current and former special education teachers informed our study. These data provided a fascinating and, at times, sobering perspective on their professional worlds. Before sharing some of the highlights from these findings and the report's recommendations to improve the retention of special education teachers, I want to underscore the serious costs associated with high teacher turnover.

California spends over \$455 million each year to recruit, hire, and prepare teachers to replace those who leave the profession or transfer to other schools

before reaching retirement age. Nearly a quarter of California's newly prepared K-12 teachers walk away from their teaching posts by the end of their first four years. On top of the monetary costs, the educational costs of high teacher turnover are nearly incalculable when one considers the loss of continuity and expertise at schools with high turnover rates. The churning of teachers in some schools is, of course, an unambiguous signal that something in the school environment is not right and needs to be fixed.

So, why do special education teachers leave?

One important finding from our study is that many special education teachers do not leave the profession altogether; instead, they take positions in general education. Approximately one-third of the teachers we surveyed who had special education credentials were teaching in general education. But whether they leave their profession or just special education, many special education teachers point to the same factors that cause general education teachers to leave, frequently citing the following concerns:

1. Bureaucratic impediments
2. Lack of support from the district office
3. Low staff morale

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Director, Special Education Division, California Department of Education	Mary Hudler
Contract Monitor and Project Liaison	Janet Canning
Editor	Mary Cichy Grady
Editorial Assistant	Donna Lee
Staff Writers	Kris Murphey
Editorial Board	Maureen Burness Linda Landry Geri West
Project Managers	Linda Blong Anne Davin
Special Contributors	Ken Futernick Richard Bray Kris Marubayashi Lori Stilling Andrea Zetlin



MARY HUDLER, DIRECTOR,
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
SPECIAL EDUCATION DIVISION

This issue of *The Special EDGE* is dedicated to the topic of special education teacher recruitment and retention, a matter that concerns educators, administrators, and parents alike. For this reason, I want to share with you the latest developments in the California Department of Education's initiatives to improve the retention of special education teachers throughout the state.

In 2003, a statewide collaborative effort completed its development of the *California Strategic Action Plan for the Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Special Education Personnel*. This comprehensive document provides the framework for implementing the state's activities to recruit, prepare, and retain special education personnel and related service providers, while leveraging existing resources and promoting sustainability.

In the same year, the California Department of Education (CDE) created the Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) Leadership Team, which for the past four years has ably assisted the Department in implementing activities related to special education teacher recruitment and preparation.

Now, a recently published research study from the California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office indicates that teacher retention—and other activities contained in the strategic action plan *must* be addressed. You can read about the findings of the CSU study in the article by Dr. Ken Futernick on the front page of this newsletter. In response to this study and the resulting report, *A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Learn*, CDE has convened the California Strategic Plan Leadership Team to focus on three areas suggested by the study: school climate, working conditions for teachers, and administrative support.

The Strategic Plan Leadership Team is comprised of a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives from statewide parent organizations, the California Teachers Association, the California Association of Resource Specialists and Special Education Teachers, the Association of California School Administrations, the California State Employees Association, California Speech-Language-Hearing Association, institutions of higher education, county offices of education, special education local plan areas, the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and other divisions within the Department. Through quarterly meetings, correspondence, and focus group participation, members of this team will assist CDE in the ongoing implementation of California's strategic action plan, given its emphasis on the new areas. The team's first meeting occurred in May 2007, during which members reviewed the status of current and proposed activities.

This year, the team plans to provide tools to local school administrators to promote collegial relationships between special educators and general educators and other school site staff. One of these tools, a Web-based survey, is designed to help administrators identify particular areas of concern. Additional online tools and resources will provide new, effective approaches to developing positive working relationships, solving problems, and enhancing school facilities, all with the goal of improving students' academic achievement. CDE staff is working with other states throughout the country and the U.S. Department of Education to develop these technical assistance materials.

Only together can we build a brighter future for students with disabilities by improving both the quality and the supply of special education personnel. Be sure to share—and discuss—this issue of *The Special EDGE* with others.

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Contact *The Special EDGE* by phone at 707-849-2275; or mail to the following address:
The Special EDGE
c/o Sonoma State University, CalSTAT/CIHS
1801 East Cotati Avenue,
Rohnert Park, California 94928
or e-mail donna.lee@calstat.org.



Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, focusing on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources

Thoughts from Educational Administrators

“Linda” has been a special education teacher for the past ten years. She is not happy. She feels overwhelmed by paperwork, longs for more time with her students, and feels underappreciated by the general education teachers. The thought of working for another 20 years depresses her. Sound familiar?

Two of the most important challenges in the field of special education involve attracting and developing a qualified workforce and creating work environments that promote teacher satisfaction and retention. Many people assume that if schools successfully recruit enough knowledgeable and skilled people into teaching, the problem of teacher shortages will be solved. Although the causes of the shortage of special education teachers are complex, attending to what needs to be done to retain all teachers is a critical part of solving the problem.

The problem
Special education teachers are leaving the field at a higher rate than general education teachers. Why? Special education teachers can quickly become overwhelmed by the myriad responsibilities in their jobs—managing IEPs, dealing with the increasing numbers of advocates and attorneys, administering alternative assessments, supervising paraprofessionals, providing assistive technologies, staying informed about complex legislation, and filling out endless paperwork. Efforts to reduce attrition should be based on an understanding of those factors that contribute to special educators’ decisions to leave the field.

A decade of research shows that work factors are critical to special educators’ job satisfaction and their subsequent career decisions (Billingsley, 2003). The majority of attrition studies focus on the effects of working

conditions in districts and schools, work assignment factors, and teachers’ affective reactions to their work. Higher salaries, positive school climate, adequate support systems at the site and district office level, opportunities for professional development, reasonable role demands, and manageable caseloads are the factors in the work environment that are associated with staying in a position. There are several practices that site and district office administrators can engage in that will positively affect retention of special education, as well as general education, teachers.

School climate

Although the two major studies in this area measured school climate differently (SPeNSE, 2002; Miller, et al., 1999), the outcomes of both studies suggest that teachers who rate a school’s climate positively are more likely to stay at that school than those teachers who have less positive views of school climate. Administrators play a crucial role in building this climate—one where teachers want to come to work and students want to learn.

One way that site administrators can facilitate the development of a positive school culture is by developing a team-based and systems approach to schoolwide positive behavioral supports (PBS). This approach teaches appropriate behavior to all students in the school and develops procedures to support those students who are at risk for, or who exhibit, chronic behavior problems.

The staff in schools with PBS in place can then focus their energies on positive interactions with the students, and the students know what the rewards are for adhering to behavioral expectations—and what the consequences are for violating them. The result is a “healthy host environment”

for pro-social behavior, where students feel respected and supported and thus are less likely to act out. Teachers are able to dedicate more minutes daily to instruction and less to behavior management. Likewise, administrators in these schools spend far less time dealing with office discipline referrals and more time on program development and other administrative duties. PBS creates a win-win climate for staff and students alike.

In Orange County, more than sixty school teams from ten districts are implementing such a program. This nationally and internationally known effort is offered under the direction of George Sugai from the University of Connecticut and Rob Horner from the University of Oregon. Sugai and Horner are the co-directors of the National Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, which is sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

There have been positive reports from schools throughout Orange County about the impact this program has had on their school climate and culture. A principal from the Tustin Unified School District, which has been involved with this program for the last three years, recently noted that the positive effects of this program are evident even with the substitute teachers, who now like coming to the school because its students are so well behaved—nothing short of miraculous for anyone who has ever been a “sub.”

Administrative support

Research suggests that teachers are also more likely to leave teaching or indicate their intention to leave because of inadequate support from administrators and colleagues (Futernick, 2007; Boe, et al., 1999; and Miller, et al., 1999). Clearly, effective support

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4. Lack of resources
5. An unsupportive principal
6. Too little time for planning and collaboration

In addition, special education teachers often pointed to factors that are unique to their work environments:

1. Inadequate support for special education students

Many teachers described how their students and programs lack adequate materials, physical space, and attention from administrators. One special education teacher working at a high-poverty elementary school said, “For nine of the 12 years I have worked as a resource specialist, I had no materials of consequence, and I shared one room with *four* others, all teaching at the same time to groups as large as ten. The noise, chaos, and confusion were hard to bear. In desperation, I found an empty room, and I moved every month to a new room for one and a half years.”

2. Lack of understanding from general education colleagues

Special educators spoke about feeling isolated from colleagues and frequently at odds with them. One 14-year veteran special education teacher explained, “The lack of understanding from general education colleagues translated into being more isolated, left out, excluded, and devalued. Oftentimes special education teachers at my school aren’t viewed as ‘real teachers.’ We are always needing to fight battles—advocating for the children to be included, getting basic teaching supplies/resources for them, or getting the teachers to understand and follow IEPs.”

3. IEPs and related paperwork

Special education teachers who left their professions pointed to the frequent changes to IEP (Individualized Education Program) forms, the lack of standardization across the state, and the lack of time or assistance for completing them. A teacher with

seven years of experience in special education complained, “IEPs seem to change every year, and it is frustrating that IEP forms are not standardized throughout the state. It takes extra time to find information on IEPs for students coming from other districts. I spend at least four hours testing every child, two hours writing every IEP, at least five hours testing for triennial reviews, and another two-to-three hours writing the report for *every* child. Most of this [work] takes place on weekends or after school gets out. We do not have release time to work on these reports. The paperwork overload is out of control. Teachers are burning out, and something needs to give. I love teaching. I really do not love the paperwork.”

Why special education teachers remain “active”

Despite the problems that cause many teachers to leave special education, many “active” special education teachers report being satisfied with their work. The three most frequently cited reasons for staying are related to the “collegial supports” in their workplace—those elements that maintain strong relationships among staff. Sixty-eight percent of special education teachers who remain in their profession said they stay because of close professional relationships with other members of the staff; 67 percent stay because their principal is supportive and effective; and 66 percent because their staff works effectively as a team. Positive morale among the staff and close personal relationships with other staff members was cited by 60 percent of on-the-job special educators. These figures point, once again, to the critical role that professional relationships play in teachers’ attitudes toward their jobs. As one survey respondent said, “I stay because I work with a partner in special education who is highly regarded by staff and administration and who was my mentor when I started at the junior high school setting. I have learned that special education can be very lonely, and many times I have

self-doubts. The progress we see is usually slow and is not always valued by the parents and certainly does not seem to be valued by society in general. I stay where I am because I have a co-teacher who shares my philosophy and whom I respect. The job is so isolating at times, but even though I could make quite a bit more money elsewhere, I cannot replace the support I get.”

Getting “inactive” special education teachers back to special education

As noted above, many teachers holding special education credentials have chosen to work in general education classrooms. Given the chronic shortage of special education teachers and the substantial investment that has already been made in their training, getting these “inactive” special education teachers back to special education is a worthy goal. When surveyed, just eight percent of the inactive special education teachers said they would return to special education if they were offered a sufficiently high salary. Twenty-two percent, nearly three times as many, said they would return to special education if many of the working conditions were improved to better support their work.

In general, those who have left special education are unwilling to return to it without improvements in teaching and learning conditions. The range of concerns these former teachers have expressed indicates that there is no single, simple change to teaching and learning conditions that would motivate them to return. That said, the positive and stirring comments from teachers who stay point to a host of system and collegial supports that can keep our valued special education teachers in the classrooms for which they were trained—and even lure a fair number of them back. As described below, what will be needed is a multifaceted approach that is based on local assessments of teaching and learning conditions and on teacher-generated solutions for improving them.

Recommendations for policy and practice

The findings from this study demonstrate that teaching and learning

conditions play a critical role in teachers' decisions to stay or leave the classroom—even more than compensation. But the study would not have added anything new to the body of research on teacher retention if it merely demonstrated that teaching and learning conditions affect teacher retention.

By providing educators and policy-makers with a clearer understanding of both the specific and general types of teaching and learning conditions that really matter to teachers, this report can help reformers construct strategies that improve schools in ways that will keep more teachers, especially experienced teachers, in the classroom. The recommendations from the report represent a balance of strategic and tactical actions that are borne out of the data collected from this K–12 teacher retention study. Implementing these recommendations will require action from local educators and statewide education officials. If, together, they commit to improving teacher retention rates in California schools, especially among special education teachers, there is an excellent chance that students and their schools will thrive.

The specific recommendations offered to retain special education teachers are as follows:

1. At the school level, collect and interpret data on teaching and learning conditions for special education; incorporate solutions into broader retention strategies.
2. Reduce the unnecessary burdens imposed by IEPs and related paperwork.
3. Cultivate strong collegial supports for special educators, with particular attention to the relationships between special education and general education teachers.
4. Expand programs that support novice special educators.

These findings have guided the construction of a sound and detailed set of recommendations that will be especially useful to state and local decision makers as they wrestle with the teacher shortage in California's public schools.

If implemented, not only will it be possible to reduce the shortage of special education teachers, but doing so will also have a profound and positive effect on student performance in all types of school settings in California:

high-poverty schools as well as low-poverty schools; high schools as well as middle and elementary schools; special education classrooms as well as general education classrooms. That is the possible dream. ♦

Inclusion in In-Service Learning

Service learning is defined by American Service Learning in Education Reform (ASLER) as “a method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized experiences that meet actual community needs.” This approach to learning takes a unique tack in the way it's realized at California State University at Chico. Since 1995, the Concurrent Education Specialist teacher preparation program at Chico has given teaching credential candidates a chance to combine service learning with their special education experience to create a whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts—grade and high school students who receive special education service are given a way to serve others.

Many of the CSU-Chico-generated service projects take place in the schools, with the credential candidates designing programs to serve school populations; for example, older students serving a lower grade. Since service learning emphasizes student involvement in choosing and designing a service project, candidates in Chico's program are able to give their students a chance to address something that is important to them. Caitlin Simpson, a credential candidate, explains: “We're not reading a scripted program. The students are developing a way to address a problem they've identified for themselves.” In her spring-semester placement in special education, she helped her students develop an anti-bullying campaign for the school.

Jayme Happ, another credential candidate, was inspired by seeing her special education students involved in service learning—and receiving it, too. Laurel Hill-Ward, coordinator of the program, agrees: “This is key for us—individuals with exceptional needs have traditionally been viewed as a population that receives, rather than gives, service to others, and we want our candidates to see the potential of students with exceptional needs to learn and participate through service to others.”

Credential candidate Kyle Pierson believes the program's philosophy of “everyone learning from each other” is perfectly suited to future teachers like himself. He explains that service learning allows special education students “to feel they've accomplished something, just as other students often do.”

Pierson worked with another candidate, Michael Ehrhorn, to help students translate expository texts into their own words, produce books, then read them to other students. “Expository texts are extremely difficult, not only for special education students but for ELL and other students,” he explains. Pierson and Ehrhorn found their students were able to learn better themselves when they broke the information down for other students. Ehrhorn says that students are eager to take control of their ideas. “For students with disabilities, service learning provides multiple ways to build on prior knowledge, use multiple intelligences, and access a meaningful education.”

“It's an amazing program, and the idea behind it is great,” Pierson says. “Different instruction to fit a learner's needs. We need to realize not every child learns the same way.” Since service learning is applied learning directed by students, it can be a very effective way to drive that home.

Collaboration Makes a Difference

Systematic collaboration between general and special educators has interested the California Department of Education for years. In 1998, the department funded a joint effort with Schwab Learning to initiate what became a concerted, long-range search for—and study of—successful collaborative schools and school districts throughout the state. Across the subsequent decade, the department has recognized and awarded 22 California sites for their collaborative and innovative approaches to supporting all students, with or without IEPs, inclusively and together. Much space has been devoted in these pages to how collaborative models benefit students: how their test scores go up, their graduation rates rise, their behavior improves; and overall, they are happier about themselves, their place in their school's social structures, their lives, and their futures.

But what about the teachers?

Why collaboration

Ten years ago, a case could have been made that collaborative models of teaching pose the classic “chicken or the egg” dilemma. Are teachers happier in collaborative systems because the teachers involved are collaborative by nature, and so are happier because it is, essentially, their *métier*? Or is there something inherent in collaboration that is fundamental to professional happiness among teachers in general? A large study of California teachers just published this spring suggests the latter.

Ken Futernick's report (see front-page article) cites the principle reasons teachers leave—and why they stay. From his findings, it is clear that supportive colleagues and administrators are central reasons both special and general education teachers remain teaching. The importance of collaboration and a system that supports collaborative efforts were specifically

and frequently mentioned in the study. And when collaborative supports are not in place, teachers are likely to be unhappy in their work, and they leave—either the school or the profession entirely.

Collaboration's characteristics

So, what is it like to work in those schools where models of collaboration are systematized—where special education teachers work shoulder to shoulder with general educators, modifying standards-based lesson plans for students with disabilities, sometimes devising strategies to challenge the gifted, and in general taking a shared responsibility in educating all students?

As mentioned, California has at least 22 different iterations of how this can work. In general, these collaborative efforts start because someone gets fed up with low tests scores, disruptive student behavior, the cost of special education, the rising number of students being referred for special services, the failure of students in special education to thrive academically, or the general sense of isolation and “second-class citizenry” that special education teachers often feel. Collaborative movements tend to start small, and teachers who participate do so because they want to.

The leadership for this sort of change often comes from the teachers themselves. But once it starts, the teachers' efforts invariably receive full support of the administration. Typically, time for teachers to collaborate is carved out of the school's daily schedule and a learning center for intensive student support becomes part of the typical school structure. A concerted and conscious effort is made to eliminate labels for students—SDL or RSP or even GATE. And all students, regardless of whether or not they are identified for special education services, are given extra support at the first sign of struggling academically. (For details

about each of the recognized collaborative sites, go to www.calstat.org/leadershipSites/index.html.) That's the short version of what it looks like. But back to the teachers. What does this approach do for them?

Juniper Elementary School

Let's start with a school that, demographically speaking, should be difficult to staff—yet it teems with satisfied teachers. Juniper Elementary, located in the Hesperia Unified School District, is home to that district's poorest student population. Seventy-one percent of its students receive free and reduced lunches, and the majority are English language learners. Yet it is the first school in the district to break the 800 mark on Academic Performance Index scores, and it is the only school in San Bernardino County to be named a Star School in the California Business for Education Excellence/Just for the Kids California awards.

The school's principal, Stephanie Poindexter, believes the school's success is a direct result of the district's ExCEL program (Excellence: A Commitment to Every Learner), which is a collaborative approach to providing extra academic support for students in the subjects where they're struggling. “This model requires a great deal of teamwork and collaboration among our staff. In the end, it makes their jobs easier because everyone is working together and helping each other. Teachers collaborate on just about everything they do to support students.”

The collaboration extends as well to instructional assistants, who are given the same in-service training, are sent to challenging conferences and workshops, and are asked to share their expertise and their experience with the credentialed staff. One of Poindexter's recent hires is a woman who returned to school and earned her special education credential—after working as an

instructional assistant at Juniper. “We make sure everyone here knows that their contribution is valued and that they are each integral to things going well. We have the top attendance record for staff in our entire district. And this kind of commitment is communicated to the students.”

In addition to experiencing the benefits of being appreciated and of sharing workloads, teachers are satisfied at Juniper because of the success of their students. “You can’t argue with the numbers,” Poindexter notes. “It’s energizing for all of us to be part of something that works so well.”

Not just the students succeed at Juniper. The school succeeds in keeping its teachers, as well. Poindexter reports a schoolwide saying: “Once a Juniper teacher, always a Juniper teacher.” In her four years as the school’s principal, she has seen very few teachers leave, and then only because they retired or had to relocate for personal reasons. In her words, the teachers do not see “the grass as greener at another school.”

Rincon Middle School

At Rincon Middle School in Escondido, Special Education Department Chair Johnnie Landreth also sees “collaboration [as] a way of life for us. When were awarded the National Blue Ribbon Award in 1999, the auditor stated that collaboration was completely understated in our application, yet it permeates our whole campus—it is truly who we are. Special education teachers do not leave Rincon once we get here. We simply don’t want to.”

And classroom teachers aren’t the only staff members happy at Rincon. Landreth notes that “when I interviewed applicants a few years ago for an instructional assistant, I had 14 people wanting to transfer to Rincon [because of the way] instructional assistants are treated here. They are a part of the team: valued, respected, given the ability to make decisions. [As a result], we have the most qualified senior assistants in the district.”

“We have had one special education

teacher leave voluntarily because she was having a baby. Another left because she had had two children within five years while she was working here. She lived far away and the commute caused her much ‘mommy stress.’” That’s it.

Rincon principal Jon Centofranchi notes that “mainstreamed special education has been the culture of the school for over 12 years. It is ‘the Rincon way.’ Teachers meet formally every week, and have the opportunity to meet informally every day during a common prep period. I believe this is a major reason why we don’t see a high attrition rate here with special education or general education teachers. Only about two teachers a year make a decision to go to another school. That’s about three percent of our total teaching staff, and it is almost entirely general education teachers [who leave]. I can honestly say that I’ve never known a teacher to leave Rincon because of our collaborative model.”

Yorba Linda Middle School

Virginia Trapani at Yorba Linda Middle School is another principal who serves a school with an extensive collaborative model. She notes that “the school has always operated with the teachers working as teams.” She describes a slight change three years ago when she and her staff “decided to make the teams into professional learning communities. . . . All teachers [now] are involved with two teams: one is their content/subject matter team; the other is their cross-curricular, grade-level team.”

It doesn’t take a specialist in human psychology to sense that Trapani is doing a number of things right. She listens to her teachers and responds to their needs. She recalls that “the special education teachers were first scattered across different teams, spread out among the content teams. But midway through the years, they asked to be on their own team, where they could share strategies for working with students and with parents [and trade ideas] for using data.” Trapani gave them what they asked for.

She encourages one-to-one collabora-

tion, as well, by making sure that new teachers are paired with someone with experience in a formal mentoring arrangement. And she asks for honesty. Twice a year, once halfway through, and then again in mid-May, she has her teachers complete a formal reflection that includes their opinion about how things are going. And they tell her. They tell her that collaborative meetings are “incredibly” and “extremely” helpful, that they are a “powerful experience” and a “positive driving force for our school.”

That kind of attention to the collaborative and relational needs of her staff has paid off. There has been no significant teacher turnover during her time as principal at Yorba Linda Middle School. One teacher left when her family had to move to another town; one young teacher moved to a school where she would be granted student loan forgiveness. Among a staff of 33, everyone else has stayed put for six years.

Sanger High School

How do general education teachers view formal collaboration? Kris Herstein from Sanger High School calls it “having a spouse on campus.” She came to teaching with a few years of motherhood under her belt, which she believes saved her from any illusion of perfection on the job. But she insists that what keeps her teaching is her relationship with the adults she works with, both other teachers and administrators. She says that these relationships “keep the frustration level from getting so high” that it could drive her out of the profession. She knows that in every job there are “crappy days.” On those days, it is the people she can count on for support who help her make it “through and back to the good days.” She has made friendships among both general education and special education staff, friendships that go beyond the workplace. These colleagues have dinner together and socialize outside of school. Herstein believes that the one significant binding element that contributes to these friendships is the fact that she and her

Collaboration, continued on page 9

systems need to be put in place that will provide teachers with the tools they need emotionally and physically to do their jobs. Administrative support includes administrators both at the site level and at the district office. In special education, administrative support at these two levels is crucial. At the site level, administrators can facilitate the acceptance and integration of special educators into the school community by taking the following steps:

- Including them as partners in grade-level collaboration meetings
- Promoting their attendance at staff meetings—especially if they are not working full time at that school site
- Promoting their representation on school-level academic and social committees
- Supporting their attendance at conferences and staff development opportunities
- Providing support at IEP meetings, especially when attended by advocates and attorneys
- Maintaining open communication and providing emotional support and opportunities for problem solving
- Allocating time for collaboration with other special educators on and off the site
- Providing opportunities for special educators to make presentations at staff meetings on special education topics germane to general education teachers
- Promoting the acceptance of students with special needs among general education teachers and parents, particularly if a program is comprised of students who have a different school of residence
- Supporting the inclusion of and acceptance of special education students in mainstream activities
- Providing ample classroom space for special education classrooms and strategically locating those

classrooms within the mainstream of the campus

- Providing curricular materials and supplies for special education teachers in the same way they would provide comparable materials for general education teachers
- Promoting special education parental involvement in school activities and committees

Support at the district office level is also important to the development and retention of special education teachers. The type of support that comes from this level is often programmatic and technical in nature. Examples of district office support include the following actions:

- Sponsoring monthly special education staff development activities on pertinent topics
- Providing access to and funding for special education teachers to attend staff development activities that are sponsored by organizations outside of the district
- Assigning each school with a contact person in the district office with whom to collaborate and consult about difficult or litigious IEP meetings, and having the contact person attend those meetings
- Providing entry-level teachers with “rookie support” meetings that focus on strategies for managing paperwork, caseloads, and classrooms; IEP do’s and don’ts; collaboration skills with general educators; communication with parents; working with paraprofessionals; and so forth
- Providing adequate classroom staff support and necessary resources
- Communicating a willingness to provide emotional support by promoting an open-door policy at the district level
- Facilitating access to a mentor

Manageable caseloads

The issue of manageable caseloads is particularly relevant in several categories of the “difficult-to-find” special education service providers, especially speech and language specialists,

occupational therapists, and physical therapists. Because of the nationwide shortage of speech therapists in particular, complicated by competition with the private sector, student caseloads for existing speech and language specialists may be quite high, making these special educators particularly vulnerable to burnout.

There are ways to avoid overtaxing these professionals and to recruit successfully in this much-needed specialty. Three districts in California have created effective ways to do just that. How they’re doing it and the results they’re getting may have broader application for recruiting and retaining special education teachers in general.

Recruitment of speech therapists

Districts in San Bernardino, Monterey, and Orange counties are working with Nova University and several California State University programs on an innovative speech therapist training and credentialing program delivered online to current classroom teachers interested in becoming speech therapists. In many cases, the district is picking up the cost of this ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association)-approved program in return for a commitment by the newly trained therapist to work a set number of years (usually five) in the district.

There are several advantages of this “grow your own” approach:

- Districts recruit their own teachers who are already settled and committed to the district and community.
- The teachers are a known quantity in terms of their ability, attitude, and personality.
- Even if the teachers are speech therapist interns, they can fill open positions immediately on beginning the program, since interns can provide therapy under the direction of a credentialed speech therapist.

Teachers in the program take classes mainly online, which constitutes a significant convenience. At the conclusion of the three- to four-

year program, they receive a master's degree and qualify for the California Speech Therapist Credential. Districts are finding the annual costs of tuition and books to be dramatically less than "renting" a speech therapist from a contract provider (which usually costs around \$100,000 annually). This concept of providing existing classroom teachers with district-paid graduate courses leading to a credential could work practicably and financially in any of the special education hard-to-staff positions.

Retention

Districts are using numerous strategies to retain the therapists they already employ and to attract and keep new ones. These strategies include enhancing salary schedules (typically 5–10 percent); offering end-of-year bonuses (usually \$1,000–\$2,000); paying for the therapist's state licensing fee; and providing therapists with laptops, clerical assistance, speech aides, or any combination of these. (Enhanced salary schedules and end-of-year bonuses must be negotiated with the teacher's union.)

While all of these strategies may help—and they may help for all teachers—probably the most important thing for school administrators to bear in mind if they want to recruit and retain good teachers is the fact that everyone wants to work in a place where he or she is successful and appreciated. In the end, the most effective way to retain teachers may be to create a culture of respect, recognition, and collaboration. ♦

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colleagues share the same, sometimes challenging, students; and they work together in an effort to support them.

She believes that teachers just need "to be heard, to be respected, to be taken seriously . . . we just need to be able to get our voices out there." She knows that at Sanger "doors are always open and the other side always offers support."

Big Bear Middle School

Special education teacher and specialized academic instructor Tracy Tokunaga at Big Bear Middle School also values the professional support inherent in a collaborative model. "There is always another adult in the classroom. I don't like teaching in isolation. I did it in my first job, but I prefer to be sharing ideas, working together on strategies, figuring out the best supports for students.

"We have kids with big problems. When you're teaching a group of kids and every need is so huge in different ways, it's great to have someone else looking at it, coming at it from a different perspective. It's about sharing the load and being better, more effective teachers in the process."

It is clear that Tokunaga and her colleagues take seriously the impact their efforts can have on the lives of their students. Their collaborative model makes them "feel better equipped to make smart, effective decisions" around that impact, in part because they aren't doing it in isolation.

According to Tokunaga, "Our success rate is huge. We have kids coming back from the high school, thanking us not just for helping them get there, but

for making possible their dreams to go to college. These are kids with disabilities of all kinds. That is a self-generating source of satisfaction that makes us stay [in teaching]."

The collaborative model is optional at Big Bear. No teacher is forced to be part of the effort. But it has been in place for 13 years, and, as Tokunaga recalls, "we've had four changes of principals, not all of them actively supportive [of the collaborative model]. The success of the model and the commitment of the teachers [are what] keep it going. . . it is a 'bottom up' system: we direct our professional lives by making a choice to teach in this way." This self-direction is part of what keeps teachers at Big Bear, where there is little teacher turnover, especially in special education. Tokunaga calls collaboration a model for "built-in success." Not a single teacher in the collaborative system at Big Bear over the last ten years has left the profession.

Collaboration's effects

As these teachers describe it, collaboration does a number of things that teachers, and particularly special education teachers, would be hard-pressed to find in a more traditional educational model:

- It offers a built-in source of immediate collegial support and understanding for the particular challenges special education teachers face daily.
- It eliminates professional isolation and the burdensome sense that any one person is left alone to be responsible for decisions that could alter—for better or worse—the academic and personal future of any one student.
- It improves the chances of academic success for all students, thus contributing to the special education teachers' sense that they are, in fact, making a difference and brightening the futures of those they teach.
- It eliminates the social isolation of the special education teacher.
- It contributes positively to a

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more. "I thought of Mr. Herman as my friend—not a teacher," said one. "He cared," shared another, "and not just for me. He opened up his classroom and helped anyone who needed it." Many of the students who spoke that day openly acknowledged that they had not been very good students in middle school. With a smile and a respectful nod to the teachers present for the service, each one reiterated the same sentiment: Mickey Herman had made a difference.

We struggled as a staff after that memorial service. It was hard moving on. We mounted a custom-made street sign, Herman's Way, on a lamp-post out on the school fire lane. We purchased rubber wristbands—like the popular LIVESTRONG bands—only in tie-dyed colors. We even had a "hippie dress-up day" at school. The sadness and sense of loss lingered, though. While each of these gestures was well intentioned, none seemed to create in a meaningful way the right tribute to the inspiration that was Mick.

It wasn't until several months later—mid-summer—that an idea first emerged. By early August, the idea had grown and the Herman's Way Project (HWP) was born. It was a simple idea really. In honor of Mickey, each staff member would commit to adopting a student at risk.

Before it was rolled out to the staff, the counselors and the administrative team assembled a list of possible student candidates. This list of our most needy students emerged out of a variety of criteria: grades, discipline records, home life, social skills, socio-economic status. We ended up with a list of about 100 students who represented all sectors of our student population: special day class students, gifted and talented students, English-as-a-second-language students, and just students. Looking over the list of assembled names in my office that day in August, I could still hear the

chorus of student voices, fresh in my mind from Mickey's memorial service. I knew we were on the right track.

During a September staff meeting, we launched the project, and in October we held a schoolwide draft. The list of student names was posted along a main wall of the library. On draft day, every teacher wrote his or her name beside a student's name on that list. That simple act was symbolic of a commitment to make a connection with a student at risk. Staff members were free to adopt whomever they felt most comfortable with, and they were free to define the parameters of the relationships.

*"If you're my student,
you're my student
for life."*

The desire, of course, was that teachers would invest time and effort in establishing a rapport. Through these relationships, we hoped to expand our individual and collective influence on students, while personalizing our school environment.

As a means of providing for accountability and opportunities for greater collaboration, teachers, counselors, and the administrative team committed to meeting once each trimester to discuss HWP kids. At these meetings, information and insights are shared, strategies are discussed, and partnerships are solidified.

It was a little bit rough in the beginning, as there was some confusion about expectations, and some teachers were simply slow to make meaningful connections with their adopted kids—after all, for many on my staff, this was new work. By the second trimester, though, the conversations had changed. They were rich in detail and much more substantive. There was ample evidence the staff was on board

and actively working to make connections with our most needy students. The individual stories shared were heartening, and I knew Mick would be proud.

Several staff members met with these students during their lunches and before and after school. Some sent notes and birthday cards. Some shared hobbies: working out in the Fitness Lab, hiking local mountain trails, biking, and cross-stitching. Others on staff who were less comfortable with this work found simple ways to express their care and concern: greeting their HWP kids at the classroom door with a smile, taking a personal interest in their well-being, and making an extra effort to encourage and support their academic success.

In all, over 150 students were adopted this past year—150 kids individually embraced by a staff of caring people who were inspired by the life and death of an amazing teacher and colleague. While Mickey Herman is no longer physically with us, he continues to teach and inspire my staff. The song "Free Bird" asks:

*If I leave here tomorrow
Would you still remember me?
For I must be traveling on, now,
'Cause there's too many places I've
got to see.*

Ironically, only a few years before the social unrest of the sixties, a staunchly conservative man who never would have understood the hippie movement had this to say about good teaching:

"... I am firm in my belief that a teacher lives on and on through his students. ... Tell me, how can good teaching ever die? Good teaching is forever and the teacher is immortal."

—Jesse Stuart, from
The Thread That Runs So True

Mick's tie-dye, his taste in music, and his courageous battle with cancer made him memorable, but it was his connections with kids—especially those disengaged and unmotivated—that make him unforgettable. ♦

Speech and Language Specialists in Schools

An anyone who is interested in a rewarding profession that is in demand will want to consider that of Speech-Language Pathology in the public school system. Schools, hospitals, private practice, contract-agencies, and other entities are competing for the limited numbers of speech-language pathologists (SLPs). As a result, salaries and incentives are increasing.

The opportunity

Over one-half of all school children requiring special education services include children with some communication and/or related disorders. As a result, many special education services in schools are provided by speech-language pathologists (also known as “speech-language specialists” or “language, speech, and hearing specialists”). In addition, because of the expanding population, increasing technology (e.g., cochlear implants for the hearing impaired), the types of special needs children (e.g., children with Autism Spectrum Disorders), and the aging-out and retirement of existing professionals, employment opportunities for SLPs are expected to grow.

Professional standards

The profession’s personnel standards for a fully qualified speech-language pathologist include a master’s degree in speech-language pathology, a national written examination, and monitored work experience for the first year of practice. These standards for an SLP are held by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and by the California Department of Consumer Affairs.

Education and training

California currently has 17 speech-language pathology master’s degree

programs in its universities. There are a variety of initiatives underway to add more university programs in this field. The national Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA), as well as the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, accredits university programs, ensuring their quality and their rigor.

Required coursework for an SLP includes anatomy, physiology, and the study of all physical development



involved in speech, language, and swallowing; the nature of disorders, acoustics, and language development; and the psychological aspects of communication. University programs are typically small, clinic-based training programs.

In addition to the growing demand for licensed or credentialed SLPs, there are also increased calls for licensed SLP assistants and speech aides. There are currently six California community colleges that offer AA degree programs for SLP Assistants. Additional programs are anticipated in 2008.

The Work

Speech-language pathologists assess and treat speech, language, cognitive

communication, voice, swallowing, fluency, and other related disorders for individuals of all ages. The efficacy and importance of early intervention for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers applies to speech and language as well as other developmental issues, making this very young population among those who receive vital and sometimes life-changing speech and language therapy. Developmental delays or disorders, learning or processing disorders, cerebral palsy, cleft-palate, hearing loss, brain injury, stroke, and stuttering represent just a few of the conditions requiring speech, language, and hearing services. Often these services are augmented and enhanced by the wide range of alternative and augmentative communication devices, from simple pictures to sophisticated computer programs and equipment.

Speech-language pathologists in schools collaborate with classroom teachers, parents, other special educators, and specialists such as school psychologists, to develop individualized instruction and services. The work they do brightens the futures and improves the lives of the children they serve. ♦

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climate of trust and appreciation among teachers and support staff.

- It appears to lower rates of teacher turnover.

While collaboration doesn’t increase anyone’s salary, and when it is first being implemented it may require a great deal of effort, it does appear to improve the overall climate and working conditions for teachers. And that is an improvement that, according to recent studies, contributes greatly toward teacher satisfaction and retention. ♦

Stellar Program at CSU-Los Angeles



After nearly a decade running a special education intern program through California State University at Los Angeles (CSU-LA), Professor Andrea Zetlin knows a lot about how to recruit and retain special education teachers. Her simple formula: “We give them a huge opportunity to learn under an umbrella of support.”

Zetlin believes that teaching credential candidates have to love children, and they have to be excited and motivated. Most of those in her program have experience in the classroom, so they know what to expect when they begin teaching. Zetlin believes they also have to be in an environment that nurtures their excitement and motivation—which is what she aims to create through her intern program.

A model of diversity

Dr. Michael McKibbin, Director of the Intern Program at the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), says that Zetlin’s program has always been a model for the ways the CTC defines diversity (not only in ethnic and racial diversity but in measuring males and second-career teaching candidates). “One of the things CSU-LA’s intern program is known for is for drawing from a diverse population,” he says. Zetlin notes that among her interns she finds many who are especially driven to work hard because they want to make a difference in the communities where they grew up. “This is a gift,” she says.

McKibbin reports that for 2006–7, CSU-LA’s special education interns were 46 percent Latino/Hispanic, 33 percent Caucasian, 9 percent African American, 9 percent Asian, 2 percent Pacific Islander, 1 percent Southeast Asian, and 1 percent Native American—very high diversity rates for special education programs. The percentage of male interns for the same

period was double the national average. And 21 percent of Zetlin’s interns were former paraprofessionals.

Fieldwork opportunities

Candidates in Zetlin’s program are given a huge opportunity to learn through early fieldwork: a Saturday teaching program at the C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center, which Zetlin and a colleague established in 1994.

The Learning Center is a community resource for 200 children, ages 5–16, from the area around the university. One third of the children have special needs. For a nominal fee, they receive educational enrichment, English language development, and other help. The interns, who are working toward their Education Specialist credential, teach a literacy-based program in an inclusive environment for a ten-week session.

The interns are given the opportunity to implement various models of instruction and to work with a wider variety of age groups than they may encounter in their regular Monday-through-Friday student teaching placement. They get experience collaborating with other teachers and practice in developing instructional plans. “We encourage them to be as creative and innovative as possible,” Zetlin explains. In their regular placement, by contrast, “they may just be in survival mode.” A university adviser observes every session to ensure that interns are individualizing the instruction and addressing each child’s needs, and to help with any questions the intern has. Interns also have access to an array of software and other technological resources.

Crucial mentoring

CSU-LA’s program provides the all-important mentoring that beginning teachers need. Even before the enhanced intern program became a reality, Zetlin says, they had a same-

credential teacher available to provide guidance to their candidates. And now there’s even more support, including a series of required meetings and workshops.

“We also help with the logistical stuff where a lot of people get lost,” Zetlin says. Interns, like any learning person, “need to feel there’s a place they can go to ask questions, and it’s a safe place. We provide that.” In some cases, she points out, these interns are the first in their families to attend college, and her program can provide vital help with the myriad forms and requirements. “We advocate for them, and help with their battles.”

University-wide support

Support for the program extends throughout the university. Since interns are required to complete their Level I credentials in two years, Zetlin and her colleagues obtain permits from the university to guarantee that the interns are enrolled in the necessary classes. “We have administrative support in their divisions and other divisions, so we are able to send up a list of names,” she explains. Staff provides help with the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) exam, reviews the interns’ requirements with them, and provides any other logistical assistance that is needed for them to succeed.

With success comes a curious problem, which, in Zetlin’s mind, is not altogether negative. Although CSU-LA’s program is helping address the shortage of special education teachers, sometimes its graduates, like many skilled special education teachers, work two or three years and then are promoted out of the classroom and into administrative positions. “But we understand that,” says Zetlin, “and it’s good to have our teachers in leadership positions too. There’s always a need for administrators to understand and be

2007 Calendar

supportive.” Project staff meets at least once a year with the partner school districts to review recruitment strategies and discuss relevant issues. Zetlin knows that principals need to be supportive of the intern/service provider relationship for it to succeed.

Since special educators are required to participate in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and other meetings to comply with federal regulations, on top of their regular classroom duties, their workloads can be especially heavy. Zetlin’s program attempts to address this in a systematic way, too. For instance, she explains, “Our teachers may need to be released from committee work and school improvement work so they can concentrate on special education.” A supportive administrator may be inclined to facilitate relief from non-special education duties.

Although researchers have found that special educators often transfer into general education, Zetlin does not think this is true for graduates of her program. She says that some may change their focus—going from a specialty in emotional issues to one of moderate-to-severe autism, for example—or they may move from public to private schools, but generally they continue in special education. The retention data—consistently in the 95–98-percent range for CSU-LA’s intern program—shows that those who train under this umbrella of support develop the skills and interests they need to stay in special education.

In 2006 Zetlin was recognized as an “Outstanding Professor” by CSU-LA. She appreciates the fact that the internship program has given her the chance to develop a close relationship with a diverse group of students, probably closer than if she had simply been teaching a class. “I can turn it around and make it enriching for them,” she says. “I like dealing with the challenges and giving a lot of advisement. We’re trying to establish a professional system of inclusion and support for special education.” ♦

August 13

Lead from Where You Are: 2007

Designed for teams made up of district and school administrators, teachers, classified staff, parents, and community stakeholders, this institute is designed to support school leadership efforts. San Ramon, CA. For more information, call 925-682-8000, ext. 4037, or go to www.calstat.org/regionalInstitute/Mt_Diablo/about.html.

August 23–25

Shaping an Accessible World: Conference of Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDI)

The focus of this conference is deafness-related telecommunications and media. New to the event this year are special workshops where attendees interact with professionals and share their ideas for an accessible world. San Francisco, CA. For more information, call 301-589-3786 or go to www.tdi-online.org.

October 1–2

2007 School Wellness Conference

This statewide effort aims to improve the learning environment in California public schools, with particular emphasis on overall healthy eating and physical education. Anaheim, CA. For more information, call 916-669-3254 or go to www.csba.org/apps/swcl.

October 3–4

Transition Connections for Functioning in Adult Life

This annual regional institute is designed for school teams (consisting of general and special education administrators, counselors, general and special education teachers, a student, and a parent) interested in learning how to establish a network of participants who support student’s success on transition from middle school to high school and from high school to work or further education. Riverside, CA. For more information, contact Gail Angus at 951-490-0375 or ganguis@valverde.edu.

October 5–6

Advances and Best Practices in Autism, Learning Disabilities, and ADHD

The Help Group’s Summit 2007 focuses on neurodevelopmental disabilities and features nationally recognized leaders in the field. Los Angeles, CA. For more information, call 818-779-5212 or go to www.thehelpgroup.org/conf.htm.

October 14–17

Ready to Learn Conference

The EduAlliance Network’s annual conference, designed as a team event for schools, is for educators dedicated to helping at-risk students achieve success with strategies for early identification, intervention, and dropout prevention. Garden Grove, CA. For more information, call 831-425-0299 or go to www.edualliance.org/2007/readytolearn/.

October 17–18

ePortfolio Institute

This conference is designed to help school teams learn how to use electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) in support of general education-special education collaborative efforts to achieve IEP goals. Teams should consist of general and special education teachers, school and district administrators, and parents. San Bernardino, CA. For more information, call 909-386-2696, e-mail april_moore@sbcss.k12.ca.us, or go to www.sbcsesport.org/published/calstat/home/1/.

October 27

DeafNation Expo

This touring trade show is for, by, and about people with hearing impairments; and admission is free. In addition to exhibitions, entertainment, and children’s activities, there are many seminars and workshops about education, finances, and more. Pleasanton, CA. For more information, go to www.deafnation.com.

Web Resources

www.ccst.us/publications/2007/2007TCPA.pdf

Critical Path Analysis of California's Science and Mathematics Teacher

Preparation System, a document prepared by the California Council on Science and Technology and Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, examines the importance of fully prepared and effective science and mathematics teachers in middle and high schools. It also examines the system of science and mathematics teacher development—recruitment, preparation, induction, professional development, and retention.

Web Sites for Teaching in California

www.teachcalifornia.org/

TEACH California provides information about how to become a credentialed teacher in California. The Web site answers questions about the requirements for becoming a teacher, finding the right teacher preparation program, locating financial aid, checking out schools and school districts, and finding a job.

www.ctc.ca.gov/

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is an agency in the Executive Branch of California State Government. Its purpose is to serve as a state standards board for educator preparation for the public schools of California, the licensing and credentialing of professional educators in the state, and more. Visit this site to learn what is required to obtain a teaching credential, to determine the status of an existing credential, or to apply for one.

<http://projectforum.org/docs/HighlyQualifiedTeachersandSpecialEducation-SeveralStateApproaches.pdf>

Highly Qualified Teachers and Special Education: Several State Approaches is an In-Brief Policy Analysis from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. It introduces research on the importance of teacher quality for student achievement and the legislative background for highly qualified special educators. It also reports on strategies that six states use to meet the requirements of highly qualified teachers, their methods for collecting data, and the barriers they face.

www.rrfcnecnetwork.org/content/view/277/471

Keeping Quality Teachers: The Art of Retaining General and Special Education Teachers provides school leaders with resources to address the retention of all teachers, especially in the area of special education. It contains a framework for action and tools that promote the retention of quality teachers and can be used to create a plan at the school or district levels or strengthen existing plans. School leaders at all levels can use the resources and strategies to ensure that students learn with quality teachers.

www.nea.org/teachershortage/recruitretentionguide.html

Meeting the Challenges of Recruitment and Retention: A Guidebook on Promising Strategies to Recruit and Retain Qualified and Diverse Teachers is a publication of the National Education Association (NEA) offering a comprehensive list of strategies that educational administrators and policymakers can use to recruit and retain teachers. This guide collects and reviews current literature on teacher recruitment and retention and contains a list of programs and approaches that

have been successfully implemented throughout the country.

www.ncctq.org/

The National Comprehensive Center on Teacher Quality works to support efforts to strengthen the quality of teaching, especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools. The center's Web site features helpful resources on challenges in teacher retention with such articles as "Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: A National Imperative" and the podcast "Teacher Turnover in At-Risk Schools."

www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/retention

A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Can Learn is an extensive study of why so many California teachers leave their profession, why others stay, and what legislators, policymakers, and school administrators can do to improve the teacher retention rate in California.

www.personnelcenter.org/pdf/retguide.pdf

Retention of Special Education Professionals: A Practical Guide of Strategies and Activities for Educators and Administrators is a guide made available online and free of charge by the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education and the Council for Exceptional Children. It summarizes retention strategies that are practical, applicable, and supported by research.

www.abt.sliidea.org/reports.htm

Sponsored by The Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, the *Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SLIIDEA)* explores the factors that affect how much time school personnel spend on special education paperwork and administrative duties.

The RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library lends materials to California's residents free of charge. The items listed on this page are just a sampling of what is available. Go to <http://www.php.com> to view the library's complete holdings and to request materials by e-mail. To order by phone, call Judy Bower at 408-727-5775.

The Collaboration Guide for Early Career Educators

Mary Susan Fishbaugh. Paul H. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore, MD; 2000; 245 pages. Written for teachers who are just starting their careers, this book addresses the importance of collaboration as a key to a successful career and describes how to work successfully with other educators, how to get the professional support that teachers need, how to manage IEP paperwork, how to relate to parents, and more. Call #22545.

Collaborative Teaming

Martha Snell and Rachel Janney. Paul H. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore, MD; 2000; 158 pages. Schools with inclusive classrooms will find this book a valuable guide on how to combine forces

with school staff members and families to ensure that the needs of individual students with disabilities are met. Educators will learn how to select team members, facilitate smooth communication during team meetings, define the team's purpose and focus, and schedule and preserve time for teaming; and how to work cooperatively with family members and paraprofessionals, co-teach with other professionals, and avoid or resolve conflict. Call #22546, 22547.

Consultation, Collaboration, and Teamwork for Students with Special Needs

Peggy Dettmer, Norma J. Dyck, Linda P. Thurston. Allyn and Bacon: Boston, MA; 2002; 400 pages. This comprehensive guide helps teachers create strong, secure educational partnerships that support inclusive educational settings for students with disabilities. Call #22931, 22932.

A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Can Learn

Ken Futernick. California State University Center for Teacher Quality:

Sacramento; 2007; 105 pages. This extensive study explores why so many California teachers leave their profession, why others stay, and what legislators, policymakers, and school administrators can do to improve the teacher retention rate in California. Call #23957.

Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching

Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL; 2001; 217 pages. This book argues that local contexts—schools, departments, and communities—matter the most in how well teachers perform in the classroom and how satisfied they are professionally. The authors' findings show that departmental cultures play a crucial role in classroom settings and expectations. Call #23804.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools

Joyce Epstein. Westview Press: Boulder, CO; 2001; 620 pages. This book describes the processes for building comprehensive programs for school and family partnerships. Among other things it provides an outline of six types of involvement for creating partnerships, as well as tips on how to gather ideas for specific practices of partnership to use in elementary, middle, and high schools. Call #23361.

Video

Collaborative Planning/Collaborative Teaching: Transforming Theory into Practice

Richard Villa. National Professional Resources; 2002; 2 videos, each 35 minutes in length. These videos explore the five components necessary to an effective collaborative teaming process. They feature co-teaching environments, as well as a staff development session, where the obstacles to co-teaching are addressed and useful techniques are offered to overcome these obstacles. Call #23388.

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Herman's Way

H

By Greg Mizel, Principal,
Mesa Verde Middle School

He was a Deadhead through and through—a throw-back to the sixties and Haight-Ashbury. A balding hippie with long frizzy hair and a Jerry Garcia-like beard, Mickey Herman had been fighting a terminal form of melanoma cancer for the better part of a decade when I first met him. He was a teacher at Mesa Verde Middle School; I was a new principal.

Though he was sick and often in pursuit of experimental treatments, Mickey loved being in his classroom and spending time with his students. Even on those days when his energy was low, teaching math was clearly Mickey's passion, his life's focus, and his gift to the world. If anything, facing his own mortality increased his desire to teach. Interactions with the kids became more and more precious, and they strengthened his resolve to continue to struggle against a disease that rarely loses.

I'll never forget the first day I walked into Mickey's classroom. Math classes are often arranged around an overhead projector, with chairs in rows or clusters. Bulletin boards are typically sparse. Mickey's classroom was an exception. Artwork hung everywhere—on the walls, on the shelves, and even from the ceiling. Mick's students regularly applied their newly acquired math skills to creating enlargement projects, tessellations, and geometric string art. His classroom was a museum of their best efforts. A huge tube of toothpaste hung next to an equally impressive toothbrush at the front of the room. A perfect two-foot-long replica of a Hershey's candy bar sat on a shelf near the back, and all along the walls



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were various other student projects: a sailing ship, a paper maché license plate, sand-blasted mirrors with math messages, and wood cutouts of mathematical theorems and postulates.

Even more impressive than the artwork, though, was the spirit of the place. You could just feel Mick's connection with his students. Perhaps it was because he was so unconventional—wearing tie-dyed T-shirts and playing the likes of Janis Joplin while students worked together in small groups. Perhaps it was his openness and honesty. Mickey freely shared his humanity with his students, even going so far as to disclose the details of his struggle with cancer. Perhaps it was his gentle and patient intelligence. Mickey understood math, and more; he had a gift for explaining it to his students without them ever feeling disrespected or foolish or burdensome. Or maybe it was the simple note he wrote to his students on a small corner of a white board that

best captured the spirit of his classroom: "If you're my student, you're my student for life."

October 20, 2005, was Mickey Herman's last day teaching. He died December 30 that same year. In January, our middle school hosted his memorial service. It was as unconventional as the man himself: no pastor or reverend or rabbi. No formal prayer. Lots of loud music, though. Guitar riffs from Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird" spilled out of the jam-packed gymnasium that day as hundreds of students—past and present—came to pay their respects to a man who had touched their lives.

Many waited 30 minutes or more, standing in long lines to give a testimonial. Uncomfortable, nervous, some visibly trembling, yet somehow compelled, each one of these young people told a very personal story about how Mickey Herman had taught them math and so much

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