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ABSTRACT

Attempting to address the unique situation of beginning teachers and respond to increasing interest in teacher training, certification, support systems, and teacher empowerment, the Select Seminar for Beginning Teachers drew together 11 new teachers, 4 returning teachers, and 5 administrators from 16 school districts in upstate New York. This divergent group met over a three-month period to reflect on the first year of teaching. Participants identified the problems and frustrations plaguing new teachers, discussed ways to support neophytes, and prepared recommendations to serve as guidelines for districts planning induction and support programs. The report lists five observations, including the need for (1) induction and support preparations well before classroom responsibilities begin; (2) collaborative program planning involving teachers, educator associations, and the community; (3) support systems containing carefully sequenced activities and balancing content, pedagogy, and interpersonal skills; (4) supportive and growth-oriented supervision and evaluation practices; and (5) recognition of the social and emotional needs of beginning teachers. Recommendations are provided concerning entering the profession, supporting new teachers, managing classrooms, and measuring beginning teachers' progress. The last section treats the deleterious effects of at-risk students on first-year teachers' well-being. Several recommended considerations are also included. (MLH)

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A View from the Inside

Report of The Select Seminar on Needs of Beginning Teachers

June, 1987

Sponsored by:

The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, University at Albany
State University of New York
The Greater Capital Region Teacher Center

The Greater Capital Region TEACHER CENTER and the School of Education, The University at Albany, State University of New York, are pleased to offer this *Report of the Select Seminar on the Needs of Beginning Teachers*. The discussions of the Select Seminar participants reflect the concern we feel for the need to promote teaching as a profession. It is our hope that the observations and recommendations contained in this report will aid districts as they prepare to welcome new teachers and facilitate the transition from novice to professional.

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A View from the Inside

Report of the Select Seminar on Needs of Beginning Teachers

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Preface

The Select Seminar on the Needs of Beginning Teachers is the fourth in a series of seminars designed to engage teachers and administrators in serious conversation about educational issues. The Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) created a format and a forum to provide opportunities for such dialogues and to report the findings

Principles guiding the CASDA select seminars include:

1. *Participants need time to share ideas, reflect upon experiences and to write.* Seminars are conducted with blocks of meeting time, spaced to allow reflections and a final intensive two-day retreat.
2. *A conducive working environment emphasizes the importance of the conversations.* The seminars are conducted in a "protected environment" away from the work site. To convey that there are high expectations for seminar results, special care is taken to provide quiet, aesthetically pleasing surroundings and superior quality food and service.
3. *The seminar participants are the experts.* The central belief on which the seminar series was founded is "that consciously competent teachers and administrators are the best arbiters of educational practice." The select seminars are successful because of the high degree of personal and professional respect afforded participants.
4. *Roles are "checked at the door"* Ideas at the select seminar stand on their own. Position, prior experience and education of participants creates no inhibition.
5. *Seminars are self-governing, with organizers serving the group.* The coordinators of the seminar provide the initial structure and on-going logistical support. Governance and direction of the seminar gradually transfer to the participants with the coordinators being directed by the seminar group at its conclusion.
6. *The experience is at least as important as the product.* All seminar participants agree that the process, the communication, is most important. The report documents the experience and validates the effort and energy of the participants.

COMMENTS:

.. My reaction to this program is overwhelmingly positive! It provided the opportunity to talk to other beginning teachers with similar problems and concerns. Too often beginning teachers tend to feel isolated. Now we know we're not alone - and we're speaking out for our needs.

..It was a refreshing idea to get away with other administrators and teachers to work on a common concern. The setting was "ideal" with time and space to work. The opportunity to interact with "peers" was exhilarating, hopeful, rejuvenating. Just what my teacher burn out symptoms were crying out for. Thank you for the opportunity!

Very stimulating and challenging experience - reinforced my own commitment to providing support for beginning teachers.

...This conference has been very productive and enjoyable. I'm very excited about the possibility of helping future first year teachers.

..If we can reduce some of the tension, stress, confusion and frustration of that first year for some...I'll be very pleased—for we all know that affects his/her teaching and whether they choose to stay in the field.

...We touched on so many issues indirectly related to the needs of beginning teaching, issues of education in general, as well as those particular to our topic. The seminar techniques are effective in promoting teacher empowerment, by giving teachers the opportunity to develop and share their own ideas and concerns and create a tangible product.

...The entire seminar, from April on, has been a source of intellectual stimulation and rejuvenation at the end of a long year. The opportunity to cull through the problems, accomplishments, frustrations of the year in order to generate positive changes or suggestions is a valuable gift. Thank you for that opportunity. It has given me renewed energy.

The concept of intense immersion into a subject in a protected environment is one I found really conducive to work and success.

.. I was most impressed with the process, and I feel that the preliminary work led to a most productive session. I worked with a good group—there was a lot of exchange—a lot of mutual learning.

..This experience of sharing and communicating with other educators has been terrific. I thoroughly enjoyed each session. Meeting people that have similar interests and goals can be very beneficial. We talked about problems and how to solve them together.

Seminar Participants

Barbara Arakelian, Teacher, Troy City Schools
David Barnes, Teacher, Schoharie High School
Patrice Barrette, Teacher, Schenectady City Schools
Jami Bocket, Teacher, Guilderland Elementary School
Laurie Cordato, Teacher, Hudson Elementary School
Linda Davenpeck, Teacher, Guilderland High School
David Floyd, Teacher, Berlin Central School
Carol Gans, Building Principal, Claverack Elementary School, Hudson City Schools
Susan Griffing, Teacher, Greenwich Central School
Susanne Hudacs, Teacher, Voorheesville High School
Nancy Ingersoll, Teacher, Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Elementary School
Beverly Jordan, Teacher, Hudson Jr. High School
W. Francis Keating, Building Principal, Hudson Middle School
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Cheryl MacCulloch, Building Principal, Clarksville School, Bethlehem Central School
Eileen McNeal, Teacher, Catskill High School
George Montone, Building Principal, Pieter B. Coeymans Elementary School, Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk Central School
Kimberly Morrison, Teacher, North Colonie Central School
Karen Tommasino, Teacher, Housick Falls High School
Walter Wheeler, Building Principal, Fort Plain Elementary School

Seminar Coordinators

Nelson Armlin, Associate Director of the Capital Area School Development Association
Dee Wamer, Mentor Teacher, Greater Capital Region Teacher Center

We extend our appreciation to Dee Wamer for her writing and editorial assistance.

Introduction

"Fully responsible for the instruction of students from the first working day, the beginning teacher performs the same tasks as the twenty-five-year veteran. Tasks are not added sequentially to allow for the gradual increase in skill and knowledge, the beginner learns while performing the full complement of teaching duties. The anxiety so induced is exacerbated by probationary status. Anxiety is increased by the limited support teachers receive in the demanding early months. The cellular organization of schools constrains the amount and type of interchange possible; beginning teachers spend most of their time physically apart from colleagues. ...it falls upon the beginning teacher to discern problems, consider alternative solutions, make a selection, and after acting, to assess the outcome. (Lortie, 1975)

In an attempt to address the unique condition of beginning teachers and as a response to increasing interest in teacher training, certification, support systems and teacher empowerment, the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) and the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center drew together eleven beginning teachers, four teachers returning to the profession after several years of absence and five administrators to explore the needs of new teachers. The members of the Select Seminar for Beginning Teachers represented sixteen rural, urban and suburban districts and encompassed elementary, middle and high school levels. This divergent group of educators met two evenings in April and May and spent an intensive two days in June reflecting on the first year of teaching. They identified the problems and frustrations that plague the new teacher, discussed ways to support the neophyte and prepared recommendations that might serve as guidelines for districts planning induction and support programs.

The report that follows resulted from the dialogues and writings of the seminar participants. It lists five major observations concerning entry into the profession. Each observation is followed by comments excerpted from group conversations or the reflective writings of the Select Seminar members.

The observations and comments prompted a series of recommendations; listed are many practical suggestions for those desiring to support the initial and continued professional growth of teachers. Each of the recommendations encourages a spirit of collegiality which the Select Seminar views as an essential ingredient of professionalism.

An increasing percentage of students in a beginning teacher's classroom may be considered at-risk for social, emotional, academic or environmental reasons. Meeting the diverse needs of these children may pose the greatest challenge to the new teacher. Members of the seminar felt so strongly about their experiences with at-risk children that a special section of this report is devoted to excerpts profiling these students and commenting on what might be done to increase their chances for success.

Observations

I.

Preparations for the induction and support of beginning teachers need to occur well in advance of the actual commencement of classroom responsibilities.

- ... Beginning teachers need orientation to the school, district and community.
 - ... A coordinated, sequential plan should be in readiness.
 - ... Teachers are hired to fill positions throughout the year and should be oriented as carefully in December or March as in September.
 - ... Supports to encourage and sustain professional growth must extend beyond the first few months of employment.
 - ... Often new teachers are treated as a dumping ground. They are given the at-risk students, the behavior problems, the lowest ability groups, the most diverse groups resulting in more preparations and anything and everything the tenured teachers no longer want. This baptism by fire can only lead to loss. . .
 - ... Any new teacher hired after March in a given year is at the mercy of the system. Requisitions for the ensuing school year are usually completed by this time of year so the new teacher has no opportunity to take part in the process.
-

"Communication, or lack thereof, is the biggest obstacle facing a beginning teacher."

II.

The shaping and implementation of beginning teacher induction and support programs should be a collaborative effort of administrators, teachers, teacher associations, and community members.

- ... When a teacher leaves college, he leaves all his support systems behind. He may no longer have the resources he once had at his fingertips and the experts in theory may not be there. He has left the protected world of the teacher in training and come to the world of reality, where, it often seems he's on his own to sink or swim.

... Outside organizations, such as CASDA and the Teacher Center, offer a differing sort of professional relationship. . . they add a dimension of inter-school relationships and connections between research and development or organizations and the school.

... Being a first year teacher is like being a first year anything. There is the excitement of a new challenge but there is also fear of the unknown. It is the responsibility of school districts, including central administration, building administration, the teachers' association, veteran teachers and all other staff, to help the new teacher overcome feelings of fear and retain the feeling of excitement.

... The report, on the needs of beginning teachers, is not going to change anything. The ideas and suggestions must be developed into an effective orientation program by each school district.

... Say the words teachers' union, credit union or NYSUT to most new teachers and the overwhelming response is: I don't know anything about them. Communication about these organizations and their services is not getting to new teachers and somehow this gap must be bridged if these new teachers are to become active members of their professional organization as tenured teachers in the future.

"Every effort must be made to create a collegial atmosphere where learning is as much the norm for teachers as for students."

III.

A support system for beginning teachers should contain carefully sequenced activities, combining traditional inservice, in class supports, opportunities to observe colleagues and access to outside professional resources. Emphasis on content, pedagogy and interpersonal skills should be balanced. Priority should be placed on those skills of most immediate need, with gradual introduction of more sophisticated methods and concepts. Adequate time for trial and incorporation should be allowed.

... A new teacher needs an *organized* support system in order to survive the first year. . . make that thrive the first year!

... There is so much to learn, and much must be learned early in the year. Helping prioritize is vital.

... Teaching is a skillful combination of art and researched effective techniques. Why should beginning teachers have to reinvent the wheel, discovering through a process of trial and error, or perhaps not at all, when we can help?

... Beginning teachers may view problems as more catastrophic than they are. A colleague may help keep perspectives in balance.

... From the administrative perspective it is important that we provide the opportunities for: 1) peer support; 2) orientation to our organization, both building and district level; 3) communication about curriculum, policies and teacher evaluation; and 4) continued professional growth of the individual through a well designed staff development program. The one caution we must exercise is not overwhelming the beginning teacher in the first year. Needs assessments with beginning teachers should be made, priorities set and a three-year plan of development established.

... New teachers work with support personnel such as aides and assistants without being trained to do so. Dealing with parent volunteers requires a finesse most new teachers lack. Often the support personnel such as aides, assistants and parent volunteers are older and possibly more experienced. Coping with that alone is a challenge for the new teacher.

"I couldn't think one week in advance and they wanted me to think a whole year in advance!"

IV.

Supervision and evaluation of beginning teachers should be supportive and growth oriented. Efforts should be made to emphasize skill development. The beginning teacher needs to become familiar with the evaluator and the evaluative criteria prior to observations.

... I remember crying after my first observation and sharing tears with other new teachers. Observations were akin to a pledge hazing.

... Most of the evaluation information given is very vague.

... Each school district has a formal contract and requirements for teacher observation and evaluation. The administrator must be prepared to completely inform the new teacher of these requirements. The teacher should know what instrument is used, pre- and post-observation requirements, what remains a part of the permanent record and rights of response. Beyond this, the administrator needs to help the teacher establish goals to work on together and agree on how to provide helpful feedback.

... Was I being evaluated as a first year teacher? Would the criteria for evaluation remain the same or be different each year?

... The old adage "a good beginning makes a good ending" is particularly true for the new teachers in a school district. The building administrator needs to establish a plan to blend the needs of the new teacher with the needs of the school.

"What I learned, I learned by trial and error."

V.

Recognition of the social and emotional needs of beginning teachers should be an important component of induction and support programs. Often the beginning teacher is relocating, establishing personal relationships and becoming a member of a new adult community. These additional stresses must be recognized and attempts made to reduce their impact.

... I remember my first year of teaching as one of great confusion, great joy, great frustration, great depression, and great satisfaction. How can so much happen in one year? ... TEACH!

... The first year teacher has so much to offer in terms of enthusiasm, new ideas—just a new face to give a building a "hot in the arm"—we must, and will make their year less traumatic so we see them at their best and not at their peak state of stress.

... An informal support group for sharing experiences and receiving encouragement will benefit the new teacher. The beginning teacher wants to be all things to all people and to solve all problems. It reduces the new teacher's stress to be reminded that he is doing his best, and that it takes time to learn all the secrets of the trade, etc.

... The position of a teacher is a very sensitive one and new teachers are aware of this. Each teacher deals with multi-faceted groupings of people: other teachers, administrators, the Board of Education, the community, the PTA, parents and, of course, their students. Each group has specific views, needs and opinions on how the task of education should be accomplished.

... Recognizing this sensitivity and adjusting actions and decisions can be very trying for the beginning teacher.

... I remember how thrilled I was to hear how high my salary was. I thought I'd be rich! I laughed at people who thought teachers weren't making enough. The laughter turned to tears when I realized the difference between gross pay and net income.

... How do we deal as inexperienced teachers when we find ourselves in a new district joining a faculty that has grown old together and seen very few new teachers of any kind in years?

■

... The Queen seemed to guess her thoughts, for she cried, "Faster! Don't try to talk! Not that Alice had any idea of doing that. She felt as if she would never be able to talk again, she was getting so much out of breath; and still the Queen cried "Faster! Faster!" and dragged her along. "Are we nearly there?" Alice managed to pant out at last.

"Now! Now!" cried the Queen. "Faster! Faster!" And they went so fast that at last they seemed to skim through the air, hardly touching the ground with their feet, till suddenly just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground breathless and giddy.

Alice looked around her in great surprise. "Why I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!"

■

"Many times in the year I would see myself as never able to get ahead."

Recommendations

ENTERING THE PROFESSION

Every school district should plan carefully to orient new teachers to the school, the district and the community. This orientation should occur before the students arrive in September, with staff participating in the orientation paid to do so. The goal should be to orient the teacher logistically, financially, emotionally, and socially as well as professionally.

Even before the new teacher is hired care should be taken to provide the best possible entry into the profession by attention to student assignments, scheduling, materials and physical surroundings. The responsibilities given beginning teachers should be cognizant of neophyte status.

District responsibilities - prior to opening day

- Prepare a simple brochure listing realtors, babysitting references, places to eat, etc.
- Tour the district pointing out schools, properties, neighborhoods of children assigned
- Conduct a "business fair" to acquaint the new teacher with medical and life insurance policies and explain salary schedules, payroll deductions, income tax information, personnel files, budget requirements
- Invite new teachers to a luncheon to meet administrators
- Notify key community members of the teacher's arrival—welcome wagon, churches, service organizations, professional associations

Building responsibilities—prior to opening day

- Tour the building pointing out specific safety features
- Introduce custodial, cafeteria and secretarial staff and find out from each what they may do for the teacher and students and how to tap their services
- Set a schedule for instruction in use of office machinery and A.V. equipment
- Survey the classroom to determine needed furniture and materials (these should be readily available due to prior planning)
- Introduce buddy or mentor for individual help in preparing for first day
- Present a calendar of events and responsibilities for September and October and review it with the new teacher. Calendar should include suggestions for preparation for events
- Alert teacher to health problems of students - discuss with school nurse

Teacher association responsibilities

- Introduce officers and building representatives
- Invite to become a member
- Explain benefits
- Highlight contract issues

- Explain dues - how much, payment schedule, how they are used
- Discuss rights and responsibilities as a member
- Connect new teacher with a specially selected association advisor
- Provide a calendar of association events
- Invite to become involved

Building administrator's responsibilities

- Check student assignments to assure balance of class—make the number of "special needs" students as few as possible
- Schedule planning periods to coincide with mentor or teachers at the same level
- Provide complete sets of texts, basic supplies, adequate furniture
- Present the teacher with a budget and catalogs - provide petty cash for immediate expenses
- Encourage custodial staff to "stop around" and offer assistance
- Pay a mentor or teacher at the same level to come in early and help the new teacher plan the first day.

SUPPORTING THE TEACHER

Schools should plan to acquaint new teachers with all the people who combine efforts to educate children. The roles of each should be clarified for the neophyte. An extremely important part of any support system is a close link, either formally or informally, with an experienced colleague. This colleague may serve as a mentor or buddy, specifically charged with supporting the beginning teacher's professional and personal development. Seminar participants felt that anyone might be the mentor of a new teacher, but that an experienced and willing teacher of the same subject or grade working in close proximity might be the most effective.

The building administrators should:

- Budget time to spend informally with the new teacher both in and outside the classroom
- Schedule regular meetings with clearly explained agendas for orienting the new teacher to building philosophies, policies, goals
- Include specialized personnel as appropriate to the above meetings
- Acquaint the new teacher with the intent, criteria and procedures for formal observation-evaluation
- Plan jointly with the new teacher any goals for improvement
- Assign a mentor or buddy to assist the new teacher and provide time within the school day for them to work together
- Encourage the new teacher to visit and observe other teachers
- Explain clearly the administrative role in classroom discipline
- Be approachable and available

The department or level chairperson should:

- Assist the new teacher in locating curriculum materials
- Help interpret curricular requirements
- Link the new teacher with others in the field
- Facilitate peer observations
- Provide guidelines for planning units of instruction - what is realistic - time constraints - testing procedures, etc.
- Act as a materials reference and/or resource
- Interpret evaluation materials
- Inform the new teacher of appropriate staff development opportunities

The mentor, buddy, or an experienced colleague should:

- Befriend the new teacher, either formally or informally
- Listen to the new teacher's joys and frustrations
- Respond to questions, presenting options
- Introduce the new teacher to colleagues
- Assist in classroom management by offering alternatives
- Direct the new teacher to appropriate resources (people and materials)
- Involve the new teacher in social and professional activities
- Interpret bulletins, agendas, etc., explaining the jargon, acronyms and new teacher's responsibilities
- Alert the new teacher to proper times to begin preparation for special events
- Observe and coach the new teacher in the classroom
- Maintain a consistently non-evaluative posture

Beginning teachers should:

- Plan to meet regularly to share experiences and explore ways to solve problems
- Seek help when needed
- Balance the pressure of work with adequate rest and recreation
- Support each other

MANAGING THE CLASSROOM

All teachers face a myriad of decisions each day in the classroom. Why should the beginning teacher understand the wheel? The recommendations in this section are intended to help the beginning teacher and experienced teacher alike to manage the classroom more effectively.

Discipline:

Because the first year teacher understands that learning occurs best in an orderly classroom, with students respectful of each other, efforts should be made to:

- Know the school and district policies on discipline
- Have a definite plan of action
- Devise several simple, clearly stated rules (5 or 6 should suffice)
- Inform students of the rules and the consequences, if they "forget" the rule
- Enforce the rules CONSISTENTLY
- Encourage students to accept responsibility for their behavior
- Utilize body language — eye contact, physical presence (move to group disturbance, etc.)
- Establish a method of removing severe cases to a "safe, private" place for cooling off and discussion.

Teaching strategies:

Since the first year teacher learns to plan lessons, present material and measure results "on the job" it is important to:

- Recognize that pedagogical skills develop slowly
- Find time regularly to reflect on what is working and what might be improved
- Observe other teachers
- Invite observation and feedback
- Allow time to practice and incorporate new techniques
- Involve a peer in setting goals
- Explore various teaching strategies through inservice offerings
- Feel comfortable trying a new strategy and adapting and adjusting to fit

Curriculum:

In order to develop and present curriculum the beginning teacher needs to:

- Survey the scope of the curriculum
- Find how it ties in horizontally (at grade level) and vertically (through grade levels) with other curriculums
- Determine materials used for guidelines and resources and texts for implementation
- Explore how the curriculum is developed—by whom? Using which resources?
- Request information on any recent updates or changes
- Discuss which variations are allowable—additions, deletions, reordering
- Seek information about goals underlying the curriculum, interdisciplinary approaches, textbook/worksheets or "hands on" approach
- Devise methods to involve students and stress thinking skills
- Determine ways to make curriculum content relevant to individual and group needs

Parent/Teacher interaction:

Recognizing that positive relationships with parents enhance a child's education, beginning teachers may wish to:

- Write a letter of introduction
- Request parents write to introduce their child
- Participate in a school open house to meet and explain curriculum and procedures
- Plan a parent "visitation" day

- Keep parents informed
- Seek input from other school personnel prior to a scheduled conference
- Schedule parent conferences to express concern and enlist parental support
- Begin the parent conference with a positive comment about the child
- Cite specifics to give the parent a clear picture of the problem
- Encourage parents to present their views
- Request the parent be an equal partner in planning a course of action
- Respond in generalities to an unexpected parent visit or call
- "Get back" to the parent after reflection or investigation time
- Inform the principal if an interchange is negative in tone
- Advise the principal of an incident with a student which might prompt parental involvement
- Keep a record of parent contacts
- Encourage parent volunteers
- Make positive contacts with parents formally and/or informally as often as possible

Time management:

Because professional demands are so great, beginning teachers may increase productivity by:

- Planning both daily and longer term goals
- Setting aside a regular time each day for planning
- Making a list of usual activities
- Outlining things to do
- Assigning priorities
- Dealing with unpleasant tasks immediately
- Setting deadlines and meeting them
- Delegating tasks when possible
- Handling papers only once
- Finding time and space to "recharge"
- Establishing a routine
- Arranging physical surroundings to save time
- Keeping a calendar with indicators of when to start advanced preparations for scheduled events.

MEASURING PROGRESS

A beginning teacher is often anxious about being observed and evaluated by a supervisor or administrator. Teacher and evaluator need to communicate clearly about the objective of the observation and the instrument used to measure progress. To help alleviate stress and to make the evaluation a positive, meaningful learning experience, the administrator might plan to:

-
- Meet with the new teacher to review the district's policy and forms used for evaluation
 - Spend informal time participating in the new teacher's normal classroom activities prior to observation

- Schedule a pre-observation conference to discuss which aspects of teaching will be the focus of the visit
- Try to "blend in" with classroom activities during the observation
- Make a special effort to schedule the post-observation conference as soon as possible
- Encourage the new teacher to choose one aspect of the observation to improve and schedule a follow-up visit just for that aspect
- Work with the new teacher to establish long and short term goals
- Determine a method to deliver feedback
- Combine frequent short visitations to evaluate rather than one long formal observation

Students-At-Risk

Participants in the Select Seminar on the Needs of Beginning Teachers invariably returned in their discussions to the difficulties of meeting the needs of the growing number of at-risk students in the normal classroom situation. Without exception, teachers of students at all age levels spoke and wrote about the impact these students had on their classrooms, their teaching and their emotions. What follows are excerpts profiling some at-risk students and reflecting the new teachers' personal concerns. Several recommended considerations are also included.

Profiles of Students at-risk. . . Kindergarten to High School

... Everything Tommy did was unusual. He could not sit still for even the shortest time or stay on task long enough to complete an assignment.

... There isn't any support from home. No one came in for a conference on the first report card. Her family wasn't notified about her progress until March. I sent several letters home and had no response.

... There had been a party, some alcohol, a sick friend and then a suicide attempt. She was absent alot because of recovery time and psychiatric observation.

... Divorced parents, mother too busy to care, a father continually throwing her out of the house, in and out of foster homes since the age of four.

... He was explosive. He threw chairs at teachers and wrecked classrooms his records said.

... Michael has a difficult life: separation from his natural father, a male "live in" who abuses both him and his mother, and hasn't had a good word to say to him for nine years, poverty, eviction, multiple step-siblings, etc.

... In my classroom George hands in blank tests, never brings a notebook or pencil, doesn't participate in group activities and frequently talks about drugs.

... He frequently talks about being left alone until dark.

... She would distract other students from their work by bringing up conflicts or making violent remarks like, "If you look at me again, I'll tear your face off and plaster it on the wall." She would always get a response from the other students.

... He is defiant with adults; rules were made for other students. He has a different sense of fair.

... Mike had severe mood swings. He required constant attention and would do anything to get it; he'd constantly disturb lessons by calling out, moving around the room, banging things, making noises and talking.

... Seth's mom is in jail for passing bad checks and a variety of drug charges. No father plays an active role in his and his two brothers' lives. All three boys live with their grandparents; Grandma has emphysema and is wheelchair bound, grandpa is an alcoholic.

... My concern began when I found a note after class. "Are you high?" "Yes."

... As the year moved forward, he didn't. He reacted with looks and statements implying, "What? Are you kidding? I'm not doing that!" I still hadn't met the parents in January.

... John worries me because in first grade he's saying, "I'm going to drop out of school. When I turn sixteen I'm moving out."

Considerations: _____

Each at-risk student assigned to a teacher, especially in the first year:

- Consumes a disproportionate amount of time
- Increases classroom management problems
- Involves the new teacher in very troubling social and family situations without adequate preparation
- Poses problems a new teacher may not realize often take years of collaborative effort to correct
- Creates intense emotional stress

Beginning Teacher Reactions to Students At-Risk

... I went into the bathroom and cried. I felt that I should have kept in control. I was seriously considering quitting my job. I felt that if I couldn't handle this unruly child, an incident might happen again. . .

... Susan was one of about 30-40 at-risk students. I am a first year teacher, three content areas to plan. . . so I let it slide.

... As his teacher, I felt hopeless and powerless.

... I became aware of why she was labelled "difficult". She used size to intimidate, if that didn't work she used her loudest voice and then she resorted to strings of violent statements laced with curses. It was a power struggle. . . over the control of *my* class!

... I discussed my problems with my principal. She assured me that it was not *me* and that I was doing fine. I did not think so. I was feeling frustrated and angry. This student made my life miserable. I felt I was neglecting the other children and I strongly resented that. How selfish he was! How unfair! I really did not like this child; I looked forward to his absences. I felt so unethical. After all, as a teacher I was supposed to love children. The guilt coupled with the frustration was overwhelming and led to many sleepless nights.

... I get very emotionally involved because I want to do the best possible job.

... I look back on this first year disillusioned and with mixed emotions. What happened to all the wonderful things I learned in college? Where's all the support I had when student teaching? I knew the first year would be difficult, but I didn't expect all of the pressures of dealing with at-risk students on top of the pressures of being a first year teacher. So much was expected of me. . . I wanted to meet those expectations. All the tears, the hard work, the worrying, must amount to something. Despite the really tough times I've had I have reached a few children. In the end that's what counts. That's what I'm holding on to. That's why I'll continue!

Considerations:

To work with students at-risk beginning teachers need to have:

- Unsolicited, constant support
- Opportunities to discuss the students' problems and their own dealing with the classroom "situation" created by the student at-risk
- Resources for "time out" (for either the troubled student or the new teacher)
- Observations of the at-risk student in other classrooms
- Flexible scheduling to provide relief
- Careful assessment of the new teacher's ability to work with at-risk students and adjustments of class roster if necessary
- Reassurance that their efforts are making a difference from a knowledgeable colleague

Endnote

The participants in the Select Seminar on the Needs of Beginning Teachers feel privileged to have collaborated in the production of this report. As proud members of the educational community, we appreciated the opportunity to share observations and insights, consider educational issues and prepare recommendations that we hope will help establish a welcoming and supportive environment for our newest colleagues.