



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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Len Swanton, Bowman Grade 4/5 Teacher and New Teacher Mentor

The numbers are staggering:

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics, almost one-third of our nation's educators leave the field within their first three years of teaching.
- Almost 50% leave after their first five years in the profession.
- While there are a variety of reasons given for leaving, "lack of professional support" is almost always cited.
- Nearly one third of America's teachers are expected to retire within the next four years.

These statistics would be cause for concern for any organization. When they reflect events that directly affect the academic achievement of our students, then the proverbial village that is needed to educate a child needs to work collaboratively to find solutions.

Throughout its history, the community of Lexington – with its deep regard for education and its remarkable history of supporting and sustaining its schools – has made every effort to attract and retain high-quality teaching staff for its children. As we welcome new teachers into our schools, we give them the support and tools they need to succeed. Numerous studies have shown that quality teacher induction and mentoring programs help beginning teachers reach their fullest potential as educators sooner, and with greater effect, than if they are left on their own.

During the past three years, Lexington's teachers and administrators have designed and implemented a comprehensive New Teacher Mentoring & Coaching Program. This program supports authentic, meaningful collaboration between our veteran teachers and those who are just entering the profession.

The results have proved rewarding for new and veteran educators alike, but it is the students who benefit most from our mentoring and coaching efforts.

The process begins before the start of a new academic year. Beginning teachers are paired with veteran LPS educators in one-to-one partnerships that continue throughout their first year of teaching. They collaborate regularly to discuss lesson planning, reflect upon classroom management, and share resources and materials to enhance instructional practice. The mentees also participate in a 3-credit graduate course entitled "Better Beginnings for Lexington Teachers" taught by veteran LPS staff members.

In their second year of teaching, mentees are partnered with an experienced teacher who serves as a “Content Coach.” The focus of the collaboration shifts to exploring opportunities for enriching and enhancing curriculum, along with investigating effective ways to differentiate instruction for students.

Throughout the mentoring process, veteran teachers bring a rich history of effective practice to the partnership, along with a sense of the school culture that is part of any learning community. In turn, their new colleagues share recent experiences in their teacher preparation programs, which often reflect the latest research in instruction and learning.

The result is the best of both worlds.

New teachers gain a better understanding of how education “theory” can translate into effective, dynamic classroom practice. Veteran teachers have the opportunity to be a reflective practitioner, to investigate innovative teaching strategies, and – as Christa McAuliffe so eloquently said – “to touch the future.”

Mentoring directly affects student learning. When teachers are given the time and resources to share best practices, to work in teams and groups to analyze and evaluate student work, and to draw upon years of teaching experience along with the most recent findings in education research, they are able to create innovative opportunities for student learning. With so much intensive attention focused on the art and science of daily instructional practice, the students naturally become the prime beneficiaries of the collaboration.

Lee Iacocca once wrote *“In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers, and the rest of us would have to settle for something less. The job of passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor anyone could have.”*

As a veteran educator in the Lexington Public Schools, I consider it an honor to be a mentor to our beginning teachers. I would be hard-pressed to think of a better investment for our students – for our future – than that of recruiting, supporting, and retaining the new teachers who bring such a wealth of knowledge, energy, commitment, and collegiality to our schools.

Len Swanton is a grade 4-5 teacher at the Bowman Elementary School and a new teacher mentor.