The Early Years of Practice:

Interim Report of a Five-Year Study of Beginning Teachers in Alberta

AN ATA RESEARCH UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2011

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Preface

The purpose of this research project, initiated in 2008, is to explore the experiences of Alberta teachers in their early years of practice. As originally conceived, the study had two main goals: (1) to identify the causes of teacher attrition in the early years and (2) to suggest induction practices that might help new teachers become committed, long-term professional educators. Since its inception, the study has grown both in scope and depth of analysis, and it now constitutes a unique contribution to the research literature.

This report presents the findings of the first three years of a five-year longitudinal study that is following a cohort of 135 teachers who had been selected at random from among those attending beginning teachers' conferences organized by the Alberta Teachers' Association in the fall of 2007. The study is being undertaken by Laura Servage, a doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta, with the assistance of graduate student Jaime Beck and Association Executive Staff Officer J-C Couture. In addition to undertaking an extensive literature review, Servage has conducted telephone interviews with the participants at the end of their first, second and third years of teaching.

Nearly one-third of new teachers anticipate that they will leave the profession sometime during their first five years. As a result, understanding the factors that both cause teachers to remain in the profession and prompt them to leave becomes crucial. Thousands of new teachers are expected to enter the profession in the coming years. As their veteran colleagues retire, these younger teachers will need to be prepared to assume leadership roles.

Assessing the conditions of practice for new teachers continues to be a long-term research and advocacy priority for the Association. As this report demonstrates, implementing the conditions that support the professional growth of new teachers will also help to ensure that schools and student learning in Alberta continue to improve.

No one set of strategies or processes will guarantee that teachers encounter optimal conditions of practice in their early years of practice. However, listening to new teachers (such as those in this study) explain both what helped and what hindered them in their first few years of practice is a good first step.

Gordon Thomas
Executive Secretary

Introduction

Preparing new teachers and helping them to achieve their full potential on the job is a complex and expensive endeavour that has significant implications for long-term workforce and leadership/succession planning. In Canada, the United States and some other OECD countries, teacher shortages in high-needs areas are exacerbated when newly minted professionals leave the profession after only a short time. In some jurisdictions, attrition rates are as high as 50 per cent within the first five years.[1]

The costs involved in hiring and supporting new teachers are not just monetary. The constant turnover of a school's staff, for example, can negatively affect the morale and efficacy of both students and teachers. The negative consequences of turnover tend to be felt most acutely in schools that are already disadvantaged and can least afford the losses. In isolated, rural and/or high-needs schools, students are too often taught by a passing parade of novice teachers. This state of affairs also increases the likelihood that the school staff, as a whole, will not develop leadership capacity. Challenged schools and districts face double jeopardy: although they have fewer resources than other schools, they bear the brunt of hiring and training a succession of new teachers.[2]

In the summer of 2008, the Alberta Teachers' Association embarked on a five-year longitudinal study of beginning teachers in Alberta. To initiate the study, researchers conducted individual telephone interviews with 135 teachers who had just completed their first year of teaching. Similarly structured telephone interviews with the same cohort followed in Year 2 and Year 3 of the study. Data from these first three years forms the basis of this analysis. The same cohort will be interviewed by telephone again at the end of Year 4 and of Year 5. In addition, the researchers will organize focus groups with the participants before the Year 4 interviews to explore in more depth the following themes that have emerged to date:

- Collaborative practices and professional learning communities are as important as, if not more important than, mentorship programs in developing new teachers.
- The induction of new teachers tends to be haphazard rather than intentional, particularly with respect to helping teachers understand that professional growth and learning requires a sustained long-term effort.
- Stable working conditions are important in ensuring effective early professional growth.
- Some early-career teachers are ill prepared for the complexity of schools, the multiplicity of student needs and the nature of their teaching assignments.
- A significant number of new teachers do not get the support they need from colleagues and administrators in their schools.

These issues will be explored in greater detail in this report. Ultimately, what began as an examination of the causes of new teacher attrition and mobility in Alberta has evolved into a richer inquiry into how early-career experiences shape teachers' identity and professional growth trajectories. At the same time, the study will continue to explore the factors that prompt teachers to move in and out of the workforce.

As study participants begin to take maternity leaves and negotiate the competing demands of work and family, the Year 3 interviews have raised some interesting questions about tenure and the balance between work and life. Year 3 also finds a small number of teachers on the verge of leaving teaching because they are unable to find secure, appropriate employment. A significant number of participants throughout the study have cited the politics around hiring practices and mobility within their district as a source of stress and a disruptive factor in their early career development.

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1. Attrition rates are difficult to track. Exceptionally high rates tend to occur in schools in low-income areas and in geographically isolated areas and in schools having very high needs. Otherwise, stated attrition rates vary from lows of about 15 per cent to highs of up to 50 per cent. According to Alberta Education's *Education Sector Workforce Planning: Framework for Action* (2010a), early-career attrition is about 25 per cent.
2. See Carroll 2005; Clark and Antonelli 2009; Darling-Hammond and Sykes 2003; Johnson, Harrison Berg and Donaldson 2005; Kersaint et al 2007; and Whisnant, Elliot and Pynchon 2005.

Snapshots over Three Years		
End of Year 1	**End of Year 2**	**End of Year 3**
• 50 per cent of participants had mentors. • 30 per cent of the secondary teachers rated “number of preps” as having a negative impact on their practice. • 71 per cent agreed that they could always get help when they needed it. • 31 per cent were definitely planning to start a family within five years.	• 53 per cent had full-time, permanent contracts. • 87 per cent had remained in the same district. • 77 per cent stated that working with a mentor would be a professional development priority. • 99 per cent ranked working in a professional learning community as a high or moderate priority for professional development.	• 58 per cent believe that budget cuts in the spring of 2010 had a significant impact on their teaching practice. • 69 per cent had taught in the same school in Years 2 and 3. • 67 per cent believe that their quality of life was better than in Year 2. • 78 per cent view teaching as a lifelong career.

How Problematic Is Attrition?

Actual attrition rates are difficult to determine because many variables affect the early career decisions of teachers. Some teachers, for example, are “pulled” out of teaching because they are enticed by other careers. Others are “pushed” out by unfavourable working conditions or the failure to obtain permanent contracts. Still others leave to have children and do not return because they have difficulty achieving a balance between their career and family commitments. The data also suggests that leaving the classroom does not necessarily mean leaving education altogether. A significant number of teachers who leave the classroom are committed educators. Such teachers fall into two categories: (1) those who wish to remain in the field but find classroom teaching unsatisfying or intolerable and (2) those who, in an effort to balance the demands of work and family, seek alternatives to full-time teaching.

Another reason that renders attrition difficult to track and analyze is that data for workforce planning is spotty, inconsistent or, in some cases, nonexistent. Classifying and tracking such employment statuses as tenure, full- versus part-time work, and contingent work—to say nothing of the extent to which these statuses are voluntary or imposed—is a challenging task. Furthermore, attrition rates cannot be considered in isolation from such other factors that affect hiring and retention as maternity leaves, unstable government funding, provincial and district policies, school hiring practices, collective agreements, and mismatches between teacher supply and the need for teachers with certain specializations who are willing to work in specific geographical locations.[3]

3. For policy issues related to teacher workforce planning, see Clark and Antonelli 2009; Darling-Hammond and Sykes 2003; and Payzant 2004.

Effective Induction Practices

The literature on new teacher induction consistently shows that an effective induction program is multifaceted. Relying on a mentor alone has a number of potentially negative consequences. A weak mentor, for example, may encourage new teachers to adopt less than optimal practices. Even the best mentor, working in a school in which collaboration is not the norm, may inadvertently perpetuate a culture of autonomy and isolation. Finally, mentors who are not matched to their inductees' grade levels and/or subject areas are of limited value because they cannot provide the lessons, resources and specific strategies that new teachers desperately need in their first year.[4]

Even when a highly effective mentor is available, new teachers require such additional support as ample opportunities for collaboration, early orientation, classroom observations, less complex teaching assignments (fewer classes to prepare for) and reduced expectations with respect to participating in extracurricular activities.[5]

Background

In March 2010, Alberta Education released a framework for teacher workforce planning. This forward-thinking framework recognizes that effective workforce planning involves, as Payzant (2004) observes, hiring talented new teachers and retaining them through effective induction practices. Among other strategic actions to improve workforce planning for the K–12 sector, the framework emphasizes the importance of funding and supporting new teacher induction programs, especially those involving mentorship.

In addition to contributing to workforce planning, effective teacher induction programs have such long-term advantages as building leadership capacity and fostering a positive school culture. The current study contributes to these goals by examining the effects on new teachers of such factors as employment stability, professional development, working conditions and collegial support. Because the study is longitudinal, it also offers an opportunity to track how teachers' professional identities, values and priorities change and evolve as they gain experience.

The preponderance of the data comes from telephone interviews of study participants conducted at the end of each year of practice. In addition, focus groups will be conducted before the Year 4 interviews to explore such questions as these that have emerged in the course of the study:

- Are formal mentorship programs more effective or less effective than other forms of collegial and administrative support?
- What is the best way to evaluate the quality of the various supports that teachers receive in their first years of practice?
- How do hiring practices and stable versus unstable working conditions affect the early career development of teachers?
- What factors influence how a teacher's philosophy of professional learning evolves during the course of his or her career?
- How have the induction experiences that participants received to date shaped their practice?

Study Methods

The 135 teachers taking part in the study were randomly selected from a database of 936 teachers who had registered for a beginning teachers' conference organized by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) in the fall of 2007. Although the majority of the participants were first-year teachers, a few were either teachers with some previous teaching experience (who were returning to the profession after a long absence) or early-career teachers who had moved to Alberta from another province. All the participants were contacted at the end of their

4. Ample research exists to support the importance of assigning mentors who are not only committed but who teach the same subjects and/or grade as their protegés. Additional research illustrates how professional development specifically aimed at improving mentors' abilities to coach and to reflect on their practice can improve the quality of mentoring (see Feiman-Nemser 2001). Some research suggests that a poor mentor can actually do more harm than good by reinforcing norms of practice that contribute to professional isolation or a negative school culture (see Carroll 2005; De Lima 2003; and Wayne, Youngs and Fleischman 2005).

5. For reviews of effective induction programs with multiple elements, see Howe 2006; and Ingersoll and Smith 2004.

first year of teaching (in 2008) and interviewed by telephone. Similar 15-minute telephone interviews were conducted in 2009 at the end of Year 2 (when 117 of the original participants were contacted) and in 2010 (when 106 participants or 78 per cent of the original sample were contacted).

The structured telephone interviews were guided by a survey containing both closed and open-ended questions that was adapted from the ATA's member opinion survey, a questionnaire that the ATA administers annually to a random sample of its members. (The survey and interview format had been piloted in a 2007 study involving 100 new teachers.) The researchers guided the participants through the survey and recorded their answers using an Internet-based form. Answers to the closed-response questions were then compiled into basic descriptive statistics, while responses to the open-ended questions were thematically analyzed using the qualitative data-analysis software NVivo. Some of the questions were repeated from one year to the next so that the responses could be compared. Other questions were added to explore themes that had emerged in the course of the study.

Summary of Year 1 and Year 2 Findings

The data obtained from the interviews conducted in the summer of 2008 (after participants had completed their first year of teaching) was consistent with the findings reported in a range of studies that not only have examined why new teachers leave the profession but have also recommended the kinds of induction programs and practices that might address the needs of beginning teachers.[6]

With few exceptions, the beginning teachers in this study reported that they had experienced high levels of stress and uncertainty in their first year and had operated in what might be called survival mode. Stress levels were highest in the case of teachers who (1) had experienced no collegial collaboration at their grade level or in their subject area(s), (2) faced large classes and/or large numbers of special needs students and (3) were required to prepare (usually at the secondary level) for several different subjects. Despite these challenges, most of the beginning teachers surveyed were stoic. They had anticipated the difficulties and long hours that they would encounter and were confident that their working conditions would improve and their stress levels decline as they gained experience.

The inductions that participants received varied widely in scope and quality. Some participants had been involved in extensive collaboration and mentorship, whereas others had been given little or no targeted professional development or support. Approximately half of the participants had experienced some form of mentorship, but the effectiveness of these programs was mixed. Some students had been assigned a mentor by the principal, whereas others had participated in highly structured mentorship programs at the district level. Mentors who were not physically present and/or did not teach the same grades or subject areas as the new teachers were far less effective than mentors who were present to provide advice on classroom management, help the new teacher get organized, offer emotional support and acclimatize the novice to school routines. Regardless of the designated mentor, however, most participants reported that they gravitated to those colleagues who could meet their immediate need for lesson plans and resources.

Participants interviewed in 2009, at the end of their second year of teaching, were generally feeling more self-confident, less stressed and more aware of having a professional identity. The extent to which participants exhibited these characteristics was related, in part, to the stability of their employment situation. Teachers who experienced greater continuity from Year 1 to Year 2 in their school communities and teaching assignments were more likely to report having a sense that they

6. For causes of early career attrition, see Buchanan 2009; Ingersoll and Smith 2004; and Kardos and Johnson 2007. Clark and Antonelli (2009) provide recent data on early career attrition in Ontario. For effective induction practices, see Glassford and Salinitri 2007; and Kardos and Johnson 2007. These studies offer empirical evidence of the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of various induction practices in terms of retaining beginning teachers. The theoretical literature also argues that effective induction should promote high-quality collaboration and professional growth over the longer term. Few studies, however, have investigated the long-term effects of induction practices.

were mastering their practice and that they were developing relationships with colleagues, students and parents. According to the literature, teachers who feel that they are part of a community are more likely to remain in the profession (Cherubini 2007). At the opposite end of the spectrum, teachers who were still experiencing disruptive change and uncertainty at the end of their second year were more likely to be discouraged about the profession and to be considering alternative careers.

Compared with the initial interviews, the Year 2 interviews were striking in two ways: respondents were much less likely to refer to themselves as novice teachers, and the high levels of anxiety so evident in the Year 1 responses had largely subsided. Both changes are likely a direct result of gaining professional experience. At the same time, it is possible that the apparent short-term gains in self-confidence and efficacy were achieved without the participants having developed such important long-term habits as reflecting on their practice and collaborating with colleagues.

Year 3 Findings

Demographics

The number of participants dropped from 135 in Year 1 to 106 in Year 3. Data in this report, except where otherwise noted, is drawn from the responses of those 106 participants. As in most longitudinal studies, sample attrition can present a problem. For example, the respondents who could not be contacted in Year 2 and Year 3 are more likely than the continuing participants to have moved around or to have dropped out of the profession. As a result, the responses from the continuing participants likely suggest an employment situation that is more stable than is characteristic of the overall sample of 135. Despite the attrition of the sample, the demographics of the respondents have remained reasonably consistent from year to year:

- 50 per cent of participants are teaching in large urban centres.

What Teachers Need to Make Their First Year Easier

Here's what some Year 1 participants said when asked what would have made their first year of teaching easier:

- "Mentors need to be teaching the same subject. I teach a specialized subject and, if it wasn't for mentors from other schools, I would have sunk. Beginning teachers need to get together with others in their field to collaborate."
- "Principals and administrators should be more involved in monitoring mentorship and just need to be available. I had wonderful administrators, but I didn't see them that often, and the connection is important."
- "Beginning teachers should have more opportunities to visit other teachers in their classrooms. I did some professional development with this, and it helped me out a lot."
- "More preparation time. I didn't even have a prep in my first year. Maybe some extra time for beginners. Lots of my work was done at home until midnight."
- "All divisions should have a teacher induction program that includes mentoring. Know that supports are available and that the division office isn't a 'scary place with scary people' but a source of support and guidance."

- Approximately 80 per cent of participants are female.
- Approximately 50 per cent of participants are teaching a single grade or a split grade in K–6.
- Approximately 20 per cent are teaching a combination of grades across two or more divisions.

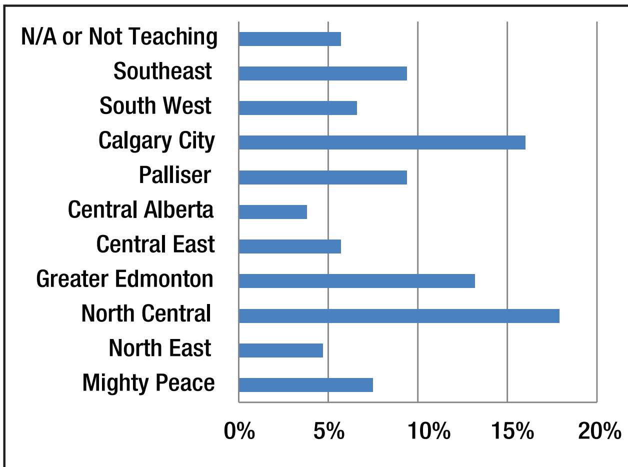

Figure 1: Study Sample by Convention Area

Although overly representative of certain convention areas, the sample, as a whole, captures teachers in a variety of settings: 51 per cent of participants were teaching in urban settings, 21 per cent in smaller urban centres and 20 per cent in rural schools. Unsurprisingly, rural and urban teachers face different workplace stressors and demands. The data to date suggests that urban teachers are more likely to face large and very diverse classes. Rural teachers, by contrast, are more likely to be isolated in their grade level or subject area and have fewer opportunities to collaborate.

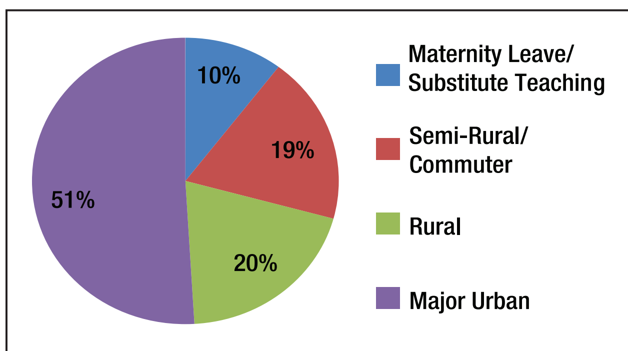

Figure 2: Study Sample by Population Density

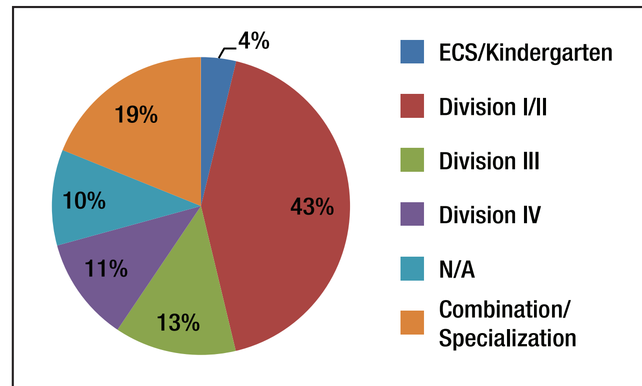

Figure 3: Study Sample by Teaching Assignment

Of the Year 3 respondents, 43 per cent were elementary generalists who taught one grade in either Division I or II. Almost 20 per cent of respondents taught a combination of grades, either in a specialized area (including special education) or, as was often the case in rural schools, in multiple subjects. Tracking participants' teaching assignments has proven difficult, a reflection, perhaps, of the complex classroom assignments that teachers face in their early years. A teacher might, for example, teach special education, have a grade-specific homeroom and teach a subject specialization (such as art or physical education) across two or more divisions.

In Year 1 and Year 2, new teachers tend to accept the teaching assignment they are given. By Year 3, however, they appear to be much more concerned about getting assignments that match their training and interests. In some cases, budget cuts and the resulting staff reductions have forced participants to accept assignments that they did not necessarily want. One respondent who taught a combination of subjects noted that teaching options in unfamiliar areas reduced her ability to master the core curriculum for the elementary grade for which she was primarily responsible. On the other hand, teachers who were moved to a subject area in which they were interested or had expertise tended to welcome the change. Likewise, teachers who felt they had significantly mastered a grade or a subject area were more receptive to a change in assignment.

Attrition and Mobility

Overall, survey participants had fairly stable placements: almost 90 per cent taught in the same district in Year 3 as they did in Year 2, and 69 per

cent taught in the same school in Year 2 as in Year 3. Participants attributed most changes in Year 3 to budget cuts. It should be noted that these figures do not include the 22 per cent of the initial sample that could not be contacted. Existing data confirms that a few of the 29 participants who could not be reached had intended to teach overseas. A few others who had earlier reported having continuing contracts are likely still teaching in the same districts. Three of the dropouts are known to have left the profession at the end of Year 2.

	Yes	No	No major assignment	N/A
Did you teach in the same district?	89%	5%	0%	5.7%
Did you teach in the same school?	69%	17%	8%	6.6%

Table 1: Teacher Mobility from Year 2 to Year 3

At the end of Year 3, 70 per cent of participants had permanent contracts for positions of 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) or more. An additional 4 per cent had a "foot in the door," meaning that they had probationary contracts or part-time permanent contracts and the prospect of increasing their teaching hours. The number of participants who substitute teach for most of the year are difficult to determine because some move in and out of temporary contracts. However, approximately 15 to 20 per cent of teachers in the sample do not yet have secure teaching positions. This category includes teachers who are on maternity leave and do not have continuing contracts to return to.

Plans to Interrupt Teaching Career

All but two of the respondents who were anticipating a leave were doing so to start a family.[7]

As some participants begin to take time off work to start families, the theme of work–life balance becomes increasingly prominent in the data. By the end of Year 3, 13 (12 per cent) of the teachers in the sample were at home with infants. Of these,

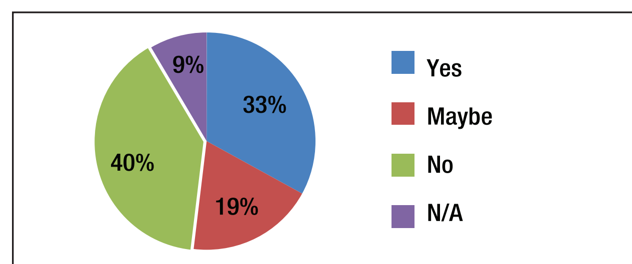

Figure 5: Plans to Interrupt Teaching Career Within Next Five Years

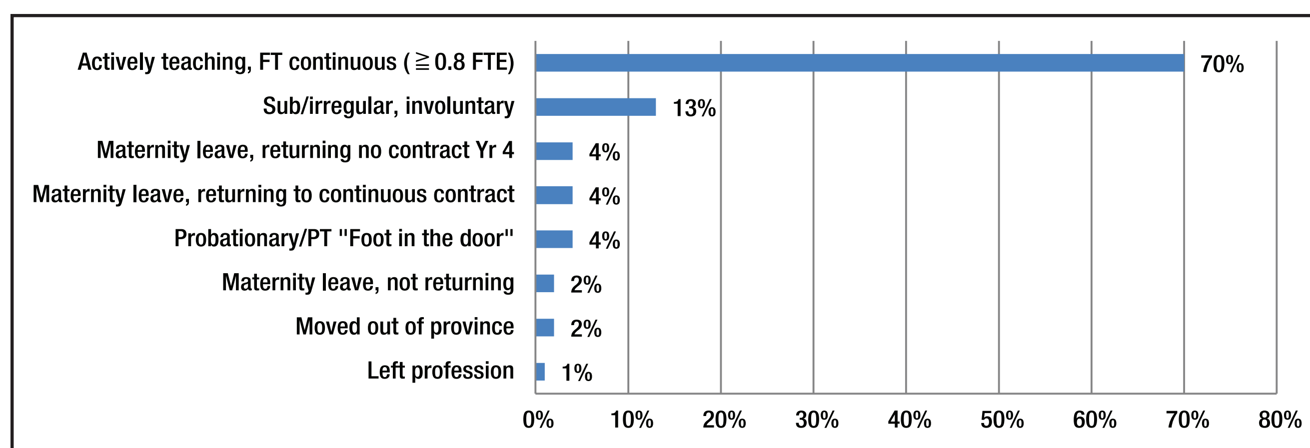

Figure 4: Status of Participants at the End of Year 3

7. This low non-family-leave figure likely reflects a "settling out" of the study sample. In Year 1, some participants were already considering alternative careers and/or travel. Some were interested in teaching overseas. Because these participants could not be contacted, the current data may underestimate how many Alberta teachers leave teaching, at least temporarily, for non-family-related reasons.

four were returning to secure contracts. Five more teachers with permanent contracts were planning to be on maternity leave for all or part of Year 4. Several of the participants in this group spoke of the stress resulting from a combination of insecure work and a desire for work–life balance. One participant with an infant at home, for example, stated that she appreciated the flexibility afforded by substitute teaching. However, she said that she had been frustrated previously when she was unable to obtain a secure position. Another participant who was returning to look for a position said that she "just wasn't prepared to put off having a baby to get a permanent contract." For some teachers who were unable to secure permanent positions, maternity leave was perhaps the best exit strategy.

Whether teachers had secure employment or not, maintaining a work–life balance appears to be a factor in deciding whether and when to start a family. One teacher put it this way:

I love teaching, but now that I have a baby, it's a huge time commitment outside of school hours. With reference to concerns about the quality of home life, I love teaching and I love my job but sometimes resent what it takes away from my personal life and the people in my life.

Some participants noted that new and preservice teachers have no grasp of the demands of the profession. The issue of maintaining a work–life balance becomes real only after a teacher has spent some time in the classroom:

I really don't think they [preservice teachers] understand the job. We had a student teacher in the school last year and it was 5 pm. I was still working, and she was surprised. There are rumours that you have long hours and you put your time in, but I don't think you know first-hand until you do it. The first year you think, "It will get better," and then it doesn't.

Factors such as summer holidays, secure work and benefits are thought to make teaching an attractive choice for women and to contribute to the feminization of the teaching profession.[8] However, judging from the comments of some of the participants about workload and the difficulty of achieving a work–life balance, teachers who are drawn to the profession at least in part because they believe it to be compatible with the demands of family life may be overestimating the amount of time that they will have available away from work.

Reasons for Leaving Teaching	
Maternity leave	16
Future plans for family	32
No family plans expressed	48
Temporary nonfamily leave planned	2
Possibly leaving the profession, nonfamily	5
Left the profession/province, Year 3	3
	106

Table 2: Maternity and Other Work Leave

Working Conditions

Teachers don't want more money to do their jobs; they want more support. When we complain, people think it's because we want more money, but we want support. We can't give enough support to the kids without more funding. I'm doing two people's jobs.

What participants say about their working conditions at the end of Year 3 of the study continues the patterns noted in Years 1 and 2. As Figure 6 shows, the most problematic areas continue to be class size and support for students with special needs. Budget cuts in Year 3 and moving into Year 4 appear to have exacerbated the problem.[9] (For ease of interpretation, the rankings "very positive" and "somewhat positive" have been combined into one category, "positive." Similarly, the rankings

8. For more on the relationship between the feminization of teaching and the perceived benefits of the profession in terms of work–life balance, see Whylie (2000). Very little research exists on work–life balance and family planning for teachers.
9. Anticipating budget shortfalls for the upcoming school year, school boards in the spring of 2010 began reducing staffing levels. These reductions, in turn, resulted in considerable speculation about the possibility of staff changes and transfers, particularly for teachers having probationary or temporary contracts.

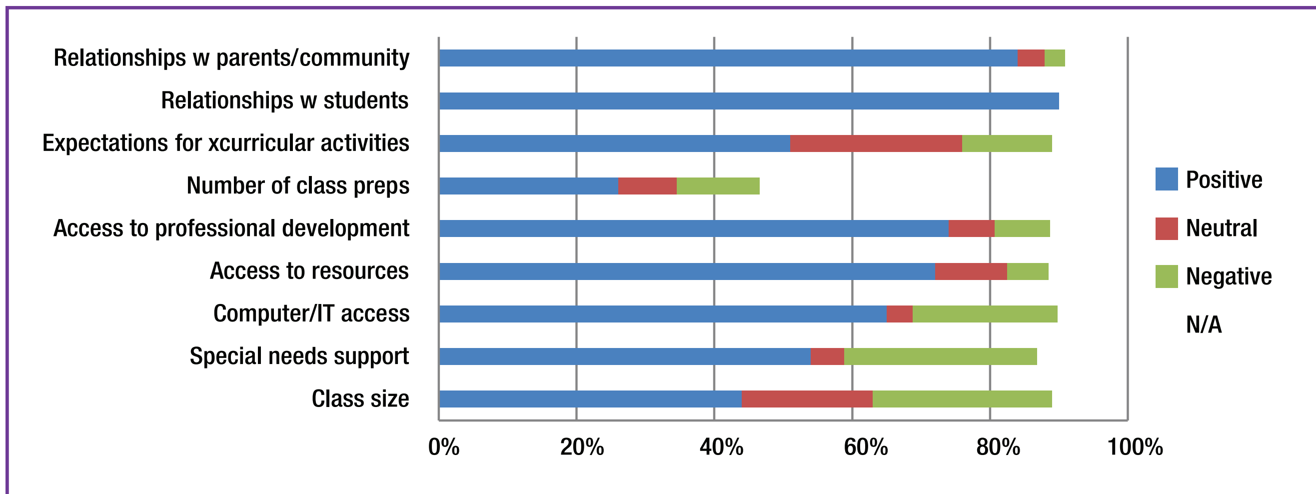

Figure 6: Teachers' Working Conditions, Year 3

"somewhat negative" and "very negative" have been collapsed into the category "negative.")

Figure 6 (above) shows changes in working conditions that participants have reported during the first three years of the study. The figures show average evaluations based on the following scale:

Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive
-2	-1	0	+1	+2

Ratings close to +2 indicate very positive evaluations, whereas ratings of 0 indicate a neutral evaluation. The averages were brought down by the significant number of negative evaluations. Participants who answered "not applicable" were factored out.

Participants' attitudes toward the profession show some modest but noteworthy shifts from Year 1 to Year 3. For example, teachers at the end of Year 3 are slightly less satisfied with their relationships with students, a decrease that likely reflects a levelling off of new teachers' idealism and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, student relationships continue to be a very satisfying aspect of teachers' work. Relationships with parents and the community show slight improvements over time, an increase that likely indicates that teachers have more confidence in interacting with parents and have become more settled in their school communities. By contrast, Year 3 participants are less satisfied with class size and supports for special needs students, declines that they attribute to staff reductions necessitated by cuts to the school budget.

Participants' satisfaction with "access to

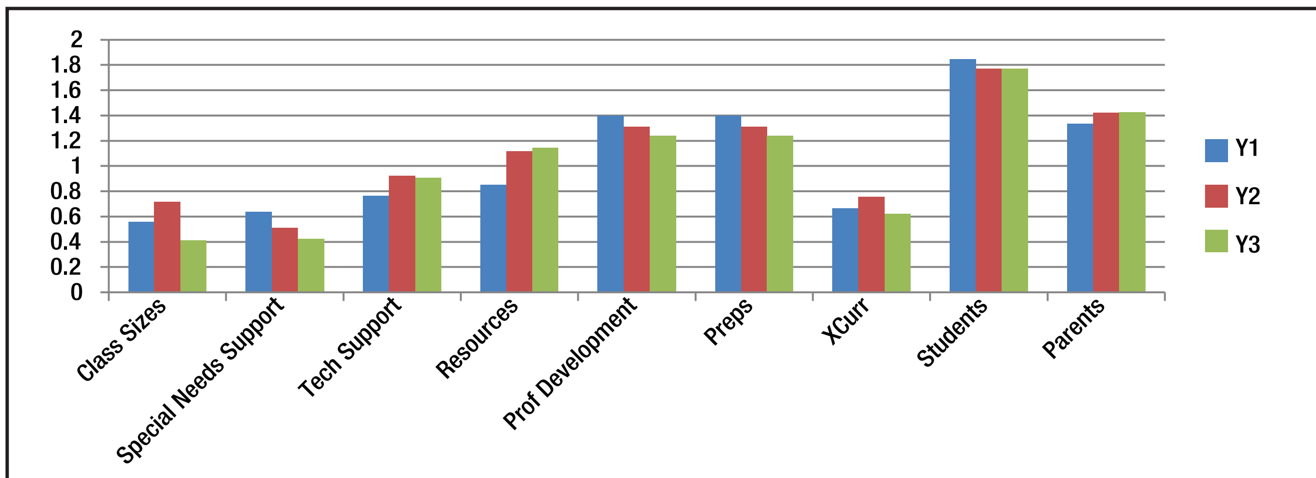

Figure 7: Changes in Working Conditions, Year 1 to Year 3

resources" and "access to technology" show a modest improvement. Although participants find SmartBoards very useful, some teachers continue to struggle with outdated computers and a lack of lab access. Lab access is particularly problematic in rural schools and for Division I/II teachers who share school resources with secondary divisions.

Impacts of Change on Professional Growth

The professional experiences of participants have ranged from highly stable to tumultuous. Some participants have moved into their positions smoothly, achieving a probationary position in the first year, remaining in the same school and keeping the same or similar teaching assignments. Such teachers have an opportunity to build relationships with colleagues, parents and community members.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are teachers who have bounced from school to school, encountered staff turnover, had their teaching assignments changed due to funding cuts, or experienced discontinuous and insecure teaching assignments. For these teachers, many of the stresses experienced in the first year of teaching have persisted in subsequent years. Such teachers, for example, continue to find themselves tackling new teaching assignments and negotiating new collegial relationships.

Participants were asked to reflect on their teaching careers to date and to evaluate the extent to which sources of change and instability had affected their growth and development. The results are shown in Figure 8. For the purpose of analysis, their responses were characterized as positive, negative or neutral. Those who had indicated that they had been affected by change were asked in the open-ended response to explain why. Interestingly, some participants, far from considering changes in staffing, administration or teaching assignment as problematic, perceived such changes as positive.

Administration Changes

Over 60 per cent of respondents reported that the leadership in their school had changed during their first three years of teaching. For the most part, participants rated the new leadership as either positive or neutral. Those who rated the change as positive mentioned such benefits as stronger instructional leadership, the articulation of a clearer vision for the school and better support for teachers in handling discipline issues. In assessing the impact of administrative change, most participants focused on broad consequences such as the effect on school morale and culture. Comparing the culture of the two schools in which she had taught, one participant noted that "one person can make a difference; if that person's in a leadership position, even more so."[10]

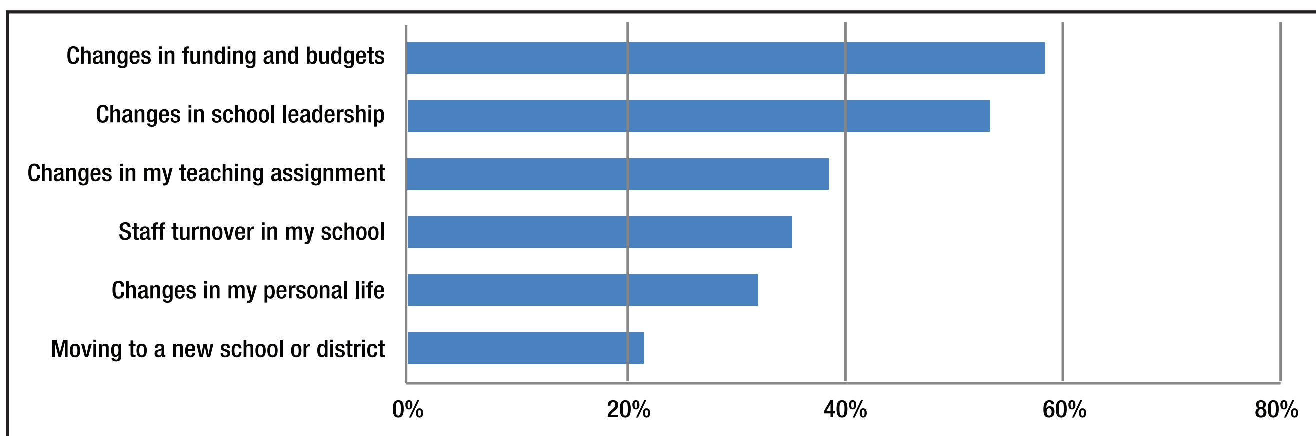

Figure 8: Percentage of Participants Who Rated a Factor as Having a "Very" or "Somewhat" Significant Effect

10. Although participants did not offer many specifics about administrator behaviours that they perceived to be "supportive" or "unsupportive," several studies have documented new teachers' perceptions of the support they received from administrators and colleagues. See, for example, Andrews, Gilbert and Martin 2006; and Kardos and Johnson 2007. Participants' perceptions of support will be explored further in focus groups.

What New Teachers Want from an Administrator

Most respondents adapted to administrative changes and learned from observing different leadership styles. But the importance of consistent, supportive administration was clear:

- "Administration had the most impact on me, for sure. Last year we had temporary/acting administrators. The new administrator [this year] totally made the difference. I would follow this principal to another school. She gave me more responsibility and [helped me to understand] what she wants. The direction in the school has influenced my confidence in my abilities."
- "I feel good about what I'm doing, but I don't get much feedback. If I got more feedback [from administration], I might feel more confident. I still question myself a little bit."
- "My new administrator was a positive change. She had a really strong vision for the school, so she did lots with our professional development and worked with our PLCs. I got great, great professional development and resources from her."
- "Asking for support is hard because you don't want to look stupid or incompetent, especially to administration. Evaluations were extremely stressful; my administrator is coming in—what if it's a bad day? Also, we're afraid that, when we ask for help, we'll be evaluated on that, when really we just need help. You want to go to your administrator and say, 'These things are going well.' But when you have to ask for help, that's hard. Home support is great, but you need that administrator support, and you don't want to be worried about getting that next job."
- "My new administrator caused me to change my expectations of myself. She was very honest and got me to really try to improve, whereas last year I didn't feel I had the same feedback."

The principal, in the words of another respondent, "really sets the tone of the school. Some [principals] are more team oriented; some are more individual and less personable with kids and with staff."

Staff Changes

Approximately one-third of respondents (36 per cent) stated that they had been greatly or somewhat affected by staff turnover in their schools. On the positive side, the departure of existing staff could mean improved job security for new teachers. Most respondents, however, talked about the negative consequences of staff turnover. One major negative consequence is a disruption in collegial relations and leadership. One participant put it this way: "[High turnover] means fewer people to learn from. [New teachers] give you new ideas, but I'm not learning as much from experienced teachers." Other participants noted that high rates of staff turnover had required them to take on mentoring or leadership roles. One participant stated, "I am being unofficially mentored by more senior staff, but the truth is that, as of now, I am senior in my school, and it's only my fourth year. [The situation] is pushing me to grow in a different way." Another teacher, less confident about being thrust into this role, commented, "They're looking to me in third year to be a mentor, but I still feel like I need a mentor, so I'm not ready for that."

A second negative consequence of staff turnover is a discontinuity in workloads and teaching assignments. As a result of turnovers, for example, new teachers might be handed more complex teaching assignments or asked to teach unfamiliar subjects. Such unexpected assignments often occurred when the staff turnover was the result of budget cuts.

Teaching Assignments

Year 3 data suggests that, for participants who are actively teaching and relatively stable in a given year,

changes in teaching assignments are levelling off. Approximately 65 per cent of the participants in this group stated that their teaching assignment in Year 3 was the same as or similar to their assignment in Year 2.[11]

On balance, teachers were not overly distressed by changes in their teaching assignments, perhaps because, through experience, they were now more self-confident and had developed better management and organizational skills. Here's how one teacher described the way in which continuity in her teaching assignments helped her to develop core skills that she was then able to apply to a new course:

> *Coming in with a new course, I didn't have to worry about how to set it up; I was able to take the "bones" of a different class I'd taught and apply it to my new course. If I'd bounced around, I would never have gotten deep enough into the teaching to learn how to make it effective. If you're doing Year 1 all the time, you don't develop those skills.*

Some teachers who had new assignments each year reported that the constant changes, while making them more confident in their ability to adapt and to think on their feet, also limited their ability to improve as teachers:

> *Changes in assignments mean you never get a chance to get better. A big part of teaching is reflecting, and when you don't get to teach [the course] again, you can't build on that. Next year, I have the same assignment, which I'm really looking forward to.*

Teachers who adapted best to changes in their teaching assignment appeared to be those who had had the opportunity to teach subjects or grades more than once in the past and, as a result, had been able to reflect on and refine their skills and practices.

Funding

Many Year 3 participants commented on the impacts of financial cutbacks, which affected two key areas: staffing levels and the availability of supplies and resources. A troubling theme in the responses was the extent to which cutbacks had disproportionately eroded support for students with special needs. One teacher reported that she had 18 students, 6 of whom had IPPs. "I have a full time educational assistant," the teacher stated, "but with the number of special needs students in my class, I definitely need more than one. But we don't have funding for more." Describing the impact of having lost her educational assistant, another teacher said, "I have to spread myself a little bit more, so my kids who need one-on-one work can't always get it." Many teachers commented that they had lost their educational assistant and that they had fewer supplies and resources available to them in working with special needs students.

Participants also reported that cutbacks were resulting in bigger classes and more complex teaching assignments. One teacher, for example, said that she now had "a straight [grade] in the morning and a split [grade] in the afternoon to save money." Another teacher who had originally been hired to provide special education support was now being required to "teach more and be in the classrooms more for regular classes instead of being able to focus on special education." A small number of teachers also attributed a reduction in their FTE status and school changes to budget cuts.

Professional Attitudes and Commitment to Teaching

> *Some people feel as if they're not making a difference. Nobody tells you that you can't help everyone. Some kids are too far gone, but some teachers think it's their fault. I mean you can try, but you shouldn't take it personally. There's a sense that you're not making a difference.*

Research consistently shows that the desire to "make a difference" is an important factor in motivating people to choose teaching as a career.[12]

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11. These figures are based on Question 13 of the Year 3 survey. "Stable" includes teachers who have permanent contracts, probationary contracts or temporary contracts for at least half of the school year. This group made up about 85 per cent of the Year 3 sample. The remainder, "no major assignment in Year 3," include substitute teachers and teachers on maternity or other leave.
12. For teachers' accounts of their reasons for entering teaching, see Goddard and Foster 2001.

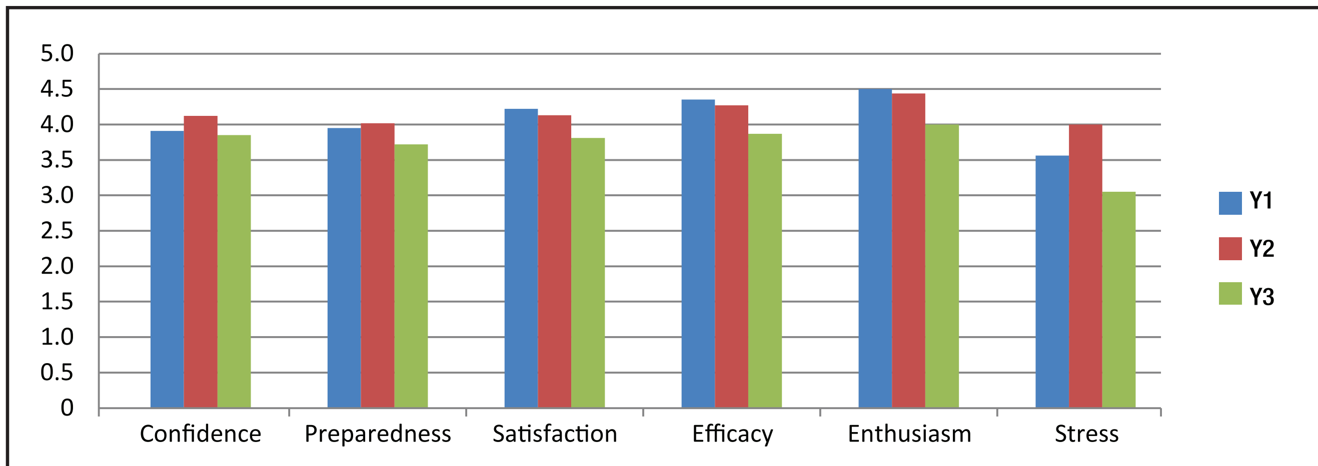

Figure 9: Attitudes Toward Teaching, Year 1 to Year 3*

*5=Very High; 4=Somewhat High; 3=Moderately High. The figures presented are averaged across the number of people participating in each year of the study.

Each year, study participants have been asked to evaluate their feelings about the profession in a number of areas, including confidence, feeling prepared for their teaching assignments and overall satisfaction. Focus groups taking place before the Year 4 interviews will be used to probe more deeply into the specific conditions and experiences that contribute to the various affective dimensions of professional identity.

Overall, modest declines are evident in the dimension being measured. These declines may reflect a tempering of the idealism that characterized teachers' responses in Year 1. Reflecting on their own experiences and observing newer colleagues, many participants commented that teachers enter the profession with unrealistic expectations and that they are ill prepared for the long hours of work and the complexities of the job. As one participant wryly commented, "It's maybe not as glamorous as some people think."

Efficacy

Gaps between what teachers want to do and what they are able to do may contribute to a decline in their sense of work satisfaction and efficacy. On a five-point scale, Year 1 teachers ranked the "belief that they could make a difference" at 4.37. By Year 3, the ranking for this belief had declined to 3.87. The data suggests that professional satisfaction may decline as teachers recognize the presence of factors over which they have little or no control:

> *[You start] learning how many other factors are going on in a school and in the child's life. There is lots beyond your control. You may think you can help, but if you don't have the support, that's disappointing. A lot of it this past year was just not being able to get the parents' support with getting the help the kids need.*

Here's how another teacher put it:

> *There's so much that goes on in the teaching profession that is out of a teacher's control that I don't even want to go there anymore: salary issues, special education, classroom issues. For me, it's people making decisions that affect classrooms when they've got no idea about what's going on in classrooms.*

Others participants suggested that these factors may contribute to early career attrition. Some teachers may "want to change the system but it's really hard to, so they almost give up."

Confidence and Preparedness

The responses suggest that teachers' sense of confidence and preparedness is related to their teaching assignments: teachers who were anticipating the same teaching assignment as in the previous year felt more confident and prepared. Another important factor in building confidence is support from an administrator:

Having the right leadership contributes to confidence, if they have your back and know that everyone's going to make mistakes and you can learn from them.

I feel good about what I'm doing, but I don't get much feedback. If I got more feedback [from an administrator], I might feel more confident. I still question myself a little bit.

Stress

Overall, participants reported lower levels of stress in Year 3 than they did in Year 1. Lower stress levels can likely be attributed to the fact that the participants have gained experience, gathered resources, mastered the curriculum, and improved their time and classroom management skills. On balance, most teachers enjoy good relationships with their students, colleagues and parents. These relationships help to reduce stress and boost overall job satisfaction.

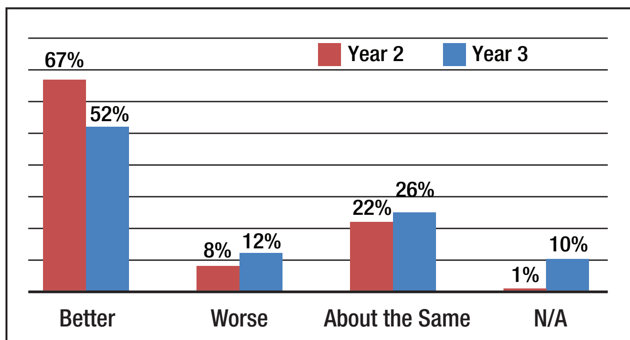

Figure 10: Quality of Life, Year 3 and Year 2

The Year 3 responses suggest that some of the stressors that were cited in Year 2, such as poor collegial relations, continue to play a role: "Staff relationships … impact your job satisfaction. It does influence your work. I don't complain about school but about the people I work with." A preceived lack of clear school goals also contributes to stress. As noted earlier, the school's administration plays a significant role in setting the morale and determining the working conditions of beginning teachers. Participants also mentioned such other sources of stress as relationships with parents, large class sizes, lack of supports for special needs students and heavy workloads. Interestingly, few teachers mentioned personal circumstances as contributing to their stress levels. Most sources of stress were work related.

Impacts of Perceived Supports and Professional Culture

The literature on teacher induction suggests that the culture of the new teacher's school plays an important role in shaping professional norms.[13] The present study confirms that school culture and administrative support are closely correlated with the new teacher's career satisfaction and early professional learning. Here's how one participant described her third year of teaching:

The worst year ever. I moved to a school that teaches differently than I do, and my new principal is very different, and the rest of the staff feels very different than I do. Our theories differ, but also the interactions. At my old school, I felt as if I belonged. At this one, I don't. At my old school, we shared resources and talked about things. In the staff room, we were able to have conversations and enjoy each other's company.

Although an extreme case, this response captures the powerful effect that school culture and collegial relationships can have on a teacher's working life. Conversely, some Year 3 participants had very positive experiences with their colleagues:

[My most effective professional development activity was] our AISI project. Less than 10 people in it, and the leader went through my year plans with me and helped me to figure out how to split my grades. My group leader was really supportive and helped me write my final exam. I don't know what I would have done without this group. It was new curriculum, and no one else could help me.

Asked about their preferred form of professional development, participants gave collaboration a high rating. Indeed, participants consistently rated

13. Kardos et al (2001) reviews the literature supporting this claim and distinguishes between "veteran oriented," "novice" and "integrated" school cultures. Integrated school cultures leverage the strengths of both experienced and beginning teachers in a highly collaborative setting.

"informal support from colleagues" as more helpful than formal professional development.[14]

Reflections on School Culture and First-Year Experiences

Year 3 of the study found the participants more secure, experienced and confident and, as a result, more articulate about the quality of the schools in which they taught. Asked why new teachers drop out of the profession, many participants described situations that some research literature would describe as "hazing."[15] Some participants characterized their colleagues as unprofessional, apathetic and/or unsupportive. Others observed that, in their school, new teachers were expected to "pay their dues" and that veterans felt entitled to receive preferred teaching assignments. Some new teachers felt that, if they made mistakes or failed to meet perceived expectations, they might be dismissed. Overall, the responses suggest that new teachers do not necessarily feel "safe" about making mistakes, asserting their needs or taking risks in their learning unless the school leadership takes deliberate steps to create a safe climate.

What New Teachers Want from Colleagues

Supportive, inspiring and engaged colleagues help new teachers to stay optimistic about their chosen profession, even during the difficult early years of teaching.

- "I'm the only one teaching the grade in my school, which makes it difficult. I would feel more comfortable if I had other colleagues teaching the same grade."
- "We had a whole slew of committees, and I like to join things and create opportunities for the students. But it's the same people volunteering each time, so it's a bit unfair. Administration said that everyone should be on one committee, but it seems like they expect the 'young and energetic' to handle all this."
- "My mentor from last year is in a different grade, but has still been incredible—still came and helped. And there were so many people helping; lots of people who have been very eager to help. We do a lot of grade-level planning and PLC planning time. We meet once a week. And outside of that people are always willing to stay and help after hours."
- "I was the youngest teacher by about 10 years. New blood was needed. Staff turnover is good, but you still need some consistency. One school I was at had about 5 new staff out of 15 every year."
- "The first school I taught at had lots of new staff come in. When a school is made up entirely of new staff it's refreshing, but also a lot of strain when it comes to getting help. Sometimes you're the second-year teacher and you're the one people come to for help. On the other hand, veteran staff can be really resistant."
- "For me, I really like the school I'm at. It's a very positive staff. We laugh a lot, we try to come up with new ideas. There's nothing negative about it, and there's really good days; sometimes it's the most fun job in the world."

14. Teachers' preferred mix of professional development activities varies considerably. While finding an overall tendency to consumptive rather than constructive forms of professional development among teachers in British Columbia, Naylor and White (2010) also note the value of using different modes of professional development to meet different needs.
15. See Anhorn 2008; and Bubb and Earley 2006.

Commitment to the Teaching Profession

On balance, the majority of respondents remained positive about their chosen profession as they moved into their fourth year of teaching. Asked whether they see teaching as a lifelong career, 76 per cent answered "yes" and 12 per cent said that they were "not sure." Those who qualified their responses observed that a strong commitment and passion for teaching are required to offset the demands of the profession.

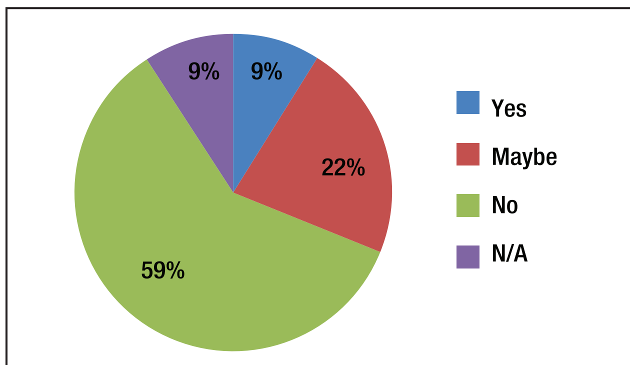

Figure 11: Would You Consider a Career Change?

Participants were asked whether, if they were able to start a new career tomorrow with the same salary and benefits, they would do so. The responses are shown in Figure 11. Because the question is hypothetical, the displayed values should not be taken as indicative of a commitment to teaching. More revealing are the comments made by participants who answered either "yes" or "not sure." These participants can be divided into two categories. In the first are teachers who are simply curious about other careers or have interests outside of teaching. Only two of these respondents mentioned having a specific alternate career in mind that they were actively considering. A subset of this category are teachers who are committed to education and wish to remain in the field but are considering alternatives to the immediate demands of the classroom. Here's how one such teacher put it:

> *Next year, I'm going part time and working at the university, so there will be some juggling. [There are] too many kids with special needs [for me] to be able to meet their needs. So that's frustrating. I started my master's this year, wanting to get out of the full-time classroom. I still enjoy what I do, but it's lots of work.*

Another teacher in this group with an interest in special education has turned to consulting work:

> *I'm enjoying what I'm doing now, which is working more with teachers. I like it more than being in the classroom. Don't know if I'd choose to be a classroom teacher. [In the] classroom, one is dealing with so many external factors you don't feel some days like you can even teach. You don't feel like you can have as much of an impact. Behaviour concerns, extracurricular activities, low levels of support for special needs, issues with parents.*

Based on their comments, teachers who wish to remain in education but not in the classroom appear to be believe that some forms of professional learning and professional rewards are not available to teachers who are engaged full-time in the classroom.

Work–Life Balance

In the second category are teachers who are considering leaving the profession not because they dislike teaching—indeed, many of them said that they "loved" it—but because they find the time demands and workload burdensome. As one teacher said, "I am enjoying teaching but there are probably other things that could draw me out—things I would enjoy just as much with less hassle." Among the "hassles" described by respondents are juggling the multiple demands of the teaching day and performing the extras that extend into off-school hours:

> *There's just so much you have to do after class: the extracurricular, marking, planning, report cards, IPPs. You could work on it every day and never be done. It's just every day, every minute of your life you're a teacher, and it would be nice to go home and say, "Okay, I'm done work."*

Other participants mentioned that, because teaching involves a level of emotional investment and caring, they felt that they were, in effect, always working. As one teacher noted, "If you take everything very personally and get very emotionally invested, it can be very draining." Another teacher said, "You don't know when to stop, but you have to give yourself permission to stop. The day is done at 3:40, but it's not a job you leave at the end of the day." "Overwhelming" is a word that many participants used to describe the volume and complexity of a teacher's workload. Here's what one respondent had to say about the causes of new teacher attrition:

If you're a teacher and you want to be a good teacher, you're doing the work of two people. Just being overwhelmed. People who stay were able to achieve a balance, and perhaps were not given overwhelming loads. Or people who just wanted it and were just like "whatever." [They] don't really care.

This comment is interesting for two reasons. First, it suggests that caring and having an overwhelming workload are intertwined. Second, it suggests that achieving a work–life balance may mean succumbing to the kind of apathy that some participants noted in their more senior colleagues.

Participants also noted that some new teachers are not prepared for the workload involved in teaching—a fault, perhaps, of teacher preparation programs.[16] Here's what a couple of participants had to say about teacher preparation experiences:

It's hard to get a real perspective on what teaching is going to look like through your practicums, which are not long-term. I think [teaching] is different than [education students] think, and it's a lot of work, and it's always on your mind.

They tell us that there is more to being a teacher than just teaching: coaching, dealing with parents, being a surrogate parent in some situations. I just don't think people see it. I didn't see it. I do now. Teaching—what you are paid to do—is only about half of where you spend your time.

Participants also noted that some of their junior colleagues and student teachers have unrealistic expectations about teaching. Others commented that some people appear to have entered the profession "for the wrong reasons" and, as a result, are unlikely to endure the workload demands.[17]

I Love Teaching, But ...

Most participants are strongly committed to their chosen profession. A few have other interests that could, as one teacher put it, "tickle their fancy" and lead to other careers. But most still love the idea and the ideals of teaching, even if they are sober about its demands.

- "I don't think I'll be a teacher forever. It is rewarding for someone who is very passionate. If you aren't glad to be a teacher when you wake up in the morning, you shouldn't be a teacher for life."
- "I love being in the classroom, but if I could have a different job somewhere down the road being a consultant or doing a special program. I'd still like to be involved in education, but I don't know. I definitely want to stay in the profession for the next few years, though."
- "It is a lifelong career, I would highly recommend it to somebody who understands that it is not an 8:30 to 3:30 job. If someone has a passion and a willingness to work, I would recommend it."
- "It is rewarding working with the kids and, if you sometimes wonder if you are succeeding, you look back to the start of the year and compare, and it was worth your time. It's quite neat that you have such an influence on kids' lives."
- "There are so many things put on teachers' shoulders: how we're supposed to teach nutrition, physical activity, social life things, not just the curriculum. The expectations placed on teachers are really high and hard to live up to. Especially if you want a home life as well."
- "To be honest, it is the stress level. Now that I've got a family and husband, I don't know if I'm prepared to make the commitment that teaching takes and have a family too."

16. Goddard and Foster (2001) discuss new teachers' frustrations when they enter the field and realize that their preservice training has not prepared them. Teachers in Year 1 of this study frequently stated that they had little or no concept of the administrative tasks and planning required during the year or of the diversity of students' needs. Time management and planning skills were gained through on-the-job experience.

17. Participants' comments about junior colleagues' expectations are similar to comments about recommending teaching as a career. Participants see teaching as a calling and believe that a deep commitment is required to ride out the demands of the work.

Early-Career Professional Development

> *When I first started teaching I was really unsure. It seemed like some people had their philosophies pinned down, but I didn't even know what my options were. Now that I've had chances to talk to others about what they're interested in and gone to different PD sessions, I've definitely streamlined it a bit more. Every teacher is different, so you do kind of need to sort it out yourself, but it might have been helpful if someone gave me some reassurance that it's okay to be unsure.*

Professional development in Year 1 generally involves meeting "basic needs" so that the teacher can survive the school year. Such needs include becoming familiar with the school's routines and administration requirements, learning the curriculum, planning lessons, and acquiring and evaluating teaching resources. Many participants reported that they barely kept their heads above water during their first year. Given this situation, new teachers urgently require the support of their administrator and colleagues.

The quality of the support that participants received varied widely. Some were fortunate to have a strong mentoring relationship or colleagues who were willing to work with them, either on their own time or in learning communities, to suggest resources and help them develop lesson plans. Others received little support. In some cases, for example, teachers with complex teaching assignments received inadequate preparation time. In other cases, especially in rural areas, teachers were isolated from their colleagues. At this end of the spectrum, what participants received could hardly be characterized as "professional development" at all. Here's what one Year 3 teacher had to say about the quality of professional development:

> *I appreciate professional development more than I did the first two years. When you're new to the profession, you just want help to get through the year, and a lot of the professional development offered is not [tailored to new teachers].When you're new, everything is new. I was more worried about getting a lesson down. That's what's hard with professional development. It's important, but it's a huge learning curve just figuring out the profession—that's professional development in and of itself. You're looking for more than you get through regular professional development. I want time with someone to help me with lesson planning.*

This comment echoes those of several other participants who emphasized that what they needed most during their first year was support and resources to get them through their classes each day. All other professional development at this stage was secondary.

The question about the type of support that new teachers require was asked at the end of each year of the study. The responses reveal an increasing willingness and ability, over time, to identify their professional development needs. Here's how a Year 3 respondent described the evolution of her professional development needs and priorities:

> *I think classroom management and planning has sorted itself out. I'm more focused now on refining my resources and knowing my subject area. You get so you have a routine and it works, and those were the kinds of things that were more of a struggle at the beginning.*

Other respondents described specific areas on which they wanted to focus. In some cases, participants were pursuing initiatives set by the district or the school. In others, the professional development was focused on the subject or grade the teacher was teaching. The extent to which participants regarded professional development offered by the school or the district as valuable depended on whether it could be applied to their own work. Some had benefited greatly from the collaborative communities created through initiatives like the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI); others found school- or districtwide initiatives irrelevant to their practice.

Regardless of what it focused on, teachers greatly preferred professional development that could be applied directly in the classroom.

> *[What I prefer are] sessions where you can really take something away. The theory stuff is not so great. Something I can use in the classroom the next day. One idea that I can apply easily and right away.*

Given that the participants are still at an early stage in their careers and are still mastering the curricula

related to a specific subject or grade level, their desire for professional development that is directly applicable to their situation is understandable. Many participants also observed that they had little time to process and incorporate learning that requires reflection and longer horizons. It is clear from the responses that some of the participants have begun to regard professional development as something to be purchased (perhaps from a private provider) and consumed in isolation from colleagues. Such an approach is, perhaps, understandable in rural areas where teachers may be isolated from colleagues teaching the same specialization. In short, while some of the participants are actively engaged in the kind of collaborative research and knowledge production advocated by school improvement literature, for others professional development is very much an individual undertaking.[18]

Collaboration

Although many teachers set their professional learning goals independently, Year 3 respondents continued to rank collaboration in professional learning communities as their highest professional development priority. Indeed, 88 per cent of participants ranked collaboration with colleagues as either a "very high" or a "moderate" priority. One teacher provided this description of a strong collaborative culture:

> *I've been given opportunities for professional development in the division and out. Every year I attend conferences and workshops. We have recently brought in an official mentorship program but, before that, it was unofficial, and I've been able to network with teachers from other schools. We've been building units and creating performance assessments. There is also a district coordinator working in my building this year, so I feel supported. We also have great resources available.*

Several participants, over the years, have commented that they don't think they would have made it without collegial support.

Professional Growth Plans

Participants were more likely to rank their professional growth plan as a high priority when they were able to share it with colleagues, review it with an administrator and/or revisit it throughout the year. On the other hand, participants who received no incentive to follow up on their plan assigned it a lower priority, although they still perceived some value in the process of setting goals and reflecting on their practice:

> *With all the other expectations this time of year, it's frustrating. I do feel it's very important, but having somebody put down a piece of paper that's not going to be looked at until the end of the year and it's signed off—that's frustrating. I question the necessity of it. I try to do all the things I say I'm going to do, though.*

One participant described how teachers in her school made developing a professional growth plan a group activity:

	Priority				
Type of Professional Development	***Very high***	***Moderate***	***Low***	***Not a priority***	***N/A***
Refining and implementing your professional growth plan	27%	**47%**	10%	9%	9%
Taking graduate level courses for university credit	11%	11%	19%	**51%**	10%
Collaborating in a professional learning community	**71%**	17%	3%	0%	9%
Working with a mentor teacher	25%	**36%**	14%	16%	9%
Online/distance collaboration or professional development	12%	**37%**	23%	19%	10%

Table 3: Participants' Rating of Their Professional Development Priorities

18. See Hargreaves and Shirley 2009a; and Darling-Hammond and Sykes 2003.

In our school we took a Friday every other week to work with a professional learning group, and we made our professional growth plans as a group, so it became very meaningful. It ended up being a big group goal.

Many participants stated that they worked on their professional goals regardless of whether they were shared or reviewed. Many also commented on the value of setting professional growth goals.

Mentorship

One half of the participants in Year 1 were involved in some sort of formal mentorship program, although the quality and comprehensiveness of these programs varied considerably. By Year 3, almost none of the participants were still involved in a formal mentorship program, although many continued to benefit from informal mentoring relationships, either with their former mentors or with other colleagues.

The responses suggest that teachers continue to value mentorship opportunities even into their third year of teaching. Asked whether they would partake in a mentorship relationship if it were available, 61 per cent of Year 3 participants said that they would make it a high priority. As one teacher put it, "I think it would be beneficial to have a mentor for a longer time; I guess you still have a mentor informally but not to the same extent." Another observed, "[Our] first year they really pushed the mentorship but it wasn't beneficial. I think it would be a lot better now that I have more focus and would ask more questions."

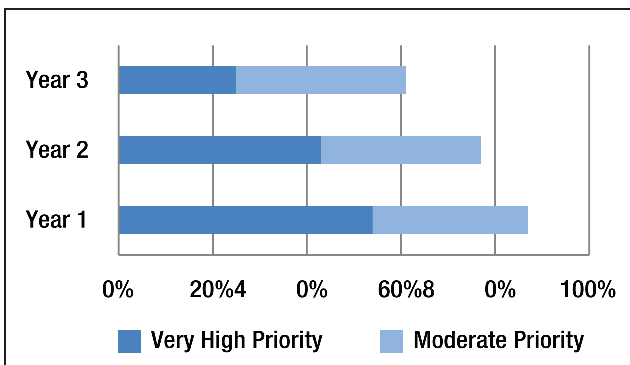

Figure 12: Rating of Mentorship as a Priority

Interestingly, some Year 3 teachers were already assuming mentorship roles. For the most part, they welcomed these opportunities and the sense of mastery that came with them. As one teacher stated, "The distance between me and my mentor is starting to level out. I learned so much from him in the beginning, but now I'm becoming a mentor myself." Allowing early-career teachers to take on mentorship roles may or may not be ideal. However, the fact that they are being asked to do so reflects the dearth of veteran staff and leaders in some schools. One participant, who had started a master's degree in Year 3 and was already mentoring student teachers, commented, "The role is flipped. Sometimes I don't know if I can control myself let alone manage a student teacher."

Looking Forward: Developing Leadership Capacity

For some participants, their own professional learning had begun to overlap with opportunities to lead and mentor other teachers. Participants found these opportunities rewarding and valuable.

I have presented professional development and it was good for me to teach teachers. Just how different it is teaching adults, and collaboration with colleagues—that education is peer oriented. It was rewarding to help other teachers.

Some participants mentioned that they wished to "give back" and to support other teachers in ways that they themselves had found valuable in the past:

It's nice to be able to work with some of the new teachers. I am happy to repay some of the mentorship that helped me. Eventually, I would like to get my master's.

Comments from study participants suggests that such early-career leadership opportunities can give teachers a sense of professional legitimacy and help connect them to their colleagues. On the other hand, thrusting leadership roles on teachers before they feel fully ready to take them on can do more harm than good. Clearly, the place of early-career leadership opportunities in a teacher's long-term professional growth requires more study.

Conclusion

On balance, the issues about professional development raised by the early-career teachers in this study reflect the questions that characterize all discussions about professional development. Should professional development be collaborative or self-

directed? Should it focus on general goals or on specific learning objectives? Should it be offered at the school level or at the division level?

Obtaining focused, coherent professional development becomes especially difficult in schools that are affected by frequent budget cuts, high staff turnovers and fluctuating enrolments. Such environments also make it more difficult for teachers to connect with others in their area of specialization.

The fact that many participants commented on the value of collaboration and the importance of being connected to a learning community suggests that the concept of embedded, site-based professional development is gradually becoming the norm. Unfortunately, the condensed telephone-interview format afforded little opportunity to probe more deeply into the nature of the participants' collaborative learning experiences. This topic, however, will be explored during the focus groups.

Implications of the Findings

The questionnaire administered to participants at the end of each year of the study has contained some of the same questions (so as to facilitate the tracking of trends) as well as new questions, designed to explore themes that emerged during the previous year. Focus groups are planned before the Year 4 interviews to explore some of these themes in more depth. Here are the main themes that have emerged so far:

- The induction of new teachers tends to be haphazard rather than intentional, particularly with respect to helping teachers understand that professional growth and learning is a lifelong endeavour.
- Collaborative practices and professional learning communities are as important as, if not more important than, mentorship programs in developing new teachers.
- Stable working conditions are important in ensuring effective early professional growth.
- Early-career teachers are ill prepared for the complexity of schools, the multiplicity of student needs and the nature of their teaching assignments
- A significant number of new teachers do not get the support they need from colleagues and administrators in their schools.
- Mismatches exist between teacher supply and the need for teachers with certain specializations who are willing to work in specific geographical locations.

Some New Teachers Feel Unprepared and Unsupported

As one participant put it, effective teacher induction should provide a "gentle, graduated level of responsibility when people come into the profession." Unfortunately, many teachers in the study experienced anything but this ideal state of affairs in their first year of practice:

> *The first year [is] not a gradual transition but more of a trial by fire. You don't really get any experience until your third or fourth year of practice, so you are already way into it.*

By Year 3, participants had gained some perspective on their own first-year experiences and were in a better position to evaluate the conditions that new teachers face. According to Year 3 participants, one reason that new teachers leave the profession is that they feel unprepared. However, their state of unpreparedness involves more than a gap between what they expected coming into the profession and what they actually experienced in their first year.[19] What they may not have anticipated is the culture that still exists in a few schools and that some researchers have termed *hazing*.[20] Many participants were also unprepared for the lack of support they received from administrators, the

19. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) use the term *praxis shock* to describe what a beginning teachers experiences when "confront[ed] with the realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher" (p 105). They argue that this experience can directly challenge the beliefs and values that the new teacher brings to practice from past experiences and preservice training. Also see Goddard and Foster 2001.

20. Patterson et al (2005, 21) defines *hazing* as "institutional practices and policies that result in new teachers experiencing poorer working conditions than their veteran colleagues." See Anhorn (2008) and Patterson (2005) for specific references to hazing.

complexity of their teaching assignments, the pressure they experienced to take on extracurricular activities, the fact that choice assignments often went to veteran colleagues and the failure of their colleagues to reach out and make them feel welcome and valued.

> *In my school and some of my friends' schools, they put the newbies in lots of extracurricular that nobody wants to do, and just this attitude that you just have to "sink or swim" when you're a new teacher. Doing everything totally from scratch and all on your own, and other teachers are just kind of "Oh well ..." My school was competitive for placements, and there is a bit of an "old boys club" where "buddies" get the better teaching assignments.*

> *I think that, as a profession, we don't set people up to be successful. There's a whole culture that exists in many schools that people have paid their dues so they deserve the cream of the crop, while the new teachers get 40 kids in a portable with no stapler. In the staff that I was in last year, a fellow retired two or three weeks into September, so they brought in a brand new graduate who is teaching Grades 7 and 8, with no repeat classes, and no prep. There are 40 kids in each of her classes.*

Often based on the notion that beginning teachers should pay their dues, such working conditions are antithetical not only to teacher learning but, ultimately, to student learning. Although participants mentioned that they had to cope with such perennial sources of stress as students with special needs, difficult parents and student misconduct, they emphasized that an even greater source of stress was the lack of support they received from administrators and more senior colleagues.

Many participants also reported that they were ill prepared for the sheer volume and complexity of the work required. Their preservice training and field experiences, they said, did not fully prepare them for the scope of work and the ongoing learning required. Developing a plan for the year, setting up classrooms, producing report cards, dealing with parents and contending with school politics were among the surprises that awaited many participants in their first year. Even third-year teachers still felt ill equipped to deal with diversity in the classroom, particularly with respect to special needs students. Clearly, much more needs to be done to help beginning teachers develop realistic expectations before assuming full-time employment.

More Than Mentorship Is Needed

Although Alberta Education is emphasizing the importance of mentorship for new teachers, mentorship constitutes only one piece of an effective induction program. In fact, many participants reported that, when their mentors proved ineffective, they turned to informal sources of support:

> *I just finished a three-year mentorship program. Considering that no one teaches in my subject area, it was only somewhat helpful. I get much more help from a group of teachers I get together with. But mentorship was helpful with classroom management, organization, those kinds of things.*

So far, the study suggests that professional learning communities are as valuable as—if not more valuable than—mentorship in the first year. Each year, participants have mentioned that they turned to collaborative professional development when a mentoring relationship proved ineffectual or nonexistent. Participants drew on these communities to get advice, locate and develop resources and lesson plans, and become a part of the school community. Indeed, this study confirms two themes that consistently emerge in the literature on mentorship and induction programs. The first is that mentorship programs must have certain components if they are to be successful. The second is that mentorship, by itself, is not enough to draw new teachers fully and meaningfully into a professional school community.

Effective Mentorships

Year 1 participants expressed a strong desire for more mentorship and collaboration but tended to focus on instrumental activities. In general, they regarded mentorship less as an opportunity to learn to teach effectively than as a means of navigating the small but time-consuming frustrations involved in adapting to the school environment—things such as learning what paperwork to fill out and how to use the photocopier—and of finding and evaluating resources needed to develop lesson, unit and yearly plans. They also looked to their mentor as a source of affective support, as someone who could reassure them and to whom they could express fears, ask questions and discuss

uncertainties. In short, the best of what mentoring has to offer—guided practice in such foundational skills as pedagogy, assessment, classroom management and reflective practice—is largely lost on Year 1 teachers, who focus most of their energies on survival. By Year 2, very few participants were still engaged in a structured mentorship programs.

Half of the Year 1 participants had a formal mentor assigned to them, and only half of this group rated that relationships as "very" or "somewhat" helpful. According to the literature, mentorship is most effective when these conditions are in place:

- The mentor has taught in the beginning teacher's subject area or (for elementary teachers) at the same grade level.
- The mentor and the mentee are allocated structured time in which to determine together how to best meet the new teacher's needs.
- The mentor is committed to cultivating the relationship. If the mentor is not actively engaged, the new teacher may be hesitant to seek help. Many Year 1 participants did not know whom to ask for help and felt that their colleagues were too busy to help them.
- The mentor is easily accessible. Even when no time is allocated for collaboration, some mentorship relationships may succeed in larger schools that have multiple classes at each grade level and/or many subject specializations. In such settings, participants who had no formal mentor or whose mentor was unsuitable would establish informal mentoring relationships.
- The mentor provides lesson plans and resources and helps the new teacher to master the curriculum.
- The mentor provides affective support and a safe space in which to ask questions and learn.

Components of an Effective Induction Program

Ingersoll and Smith (2004, 35) found that the induction practices associated with higher retention rates include "having a mentor from the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject, having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers and being part of an external network of teachers." Besides having mentors and participating in learning communities, new teachers also benefit from the following induction supports, few of which were mentioned by participants in this study:

Mentoring Matters

Mentorship was foremost on the mind of Year 1 participants. If they didn't have a mentor, they wanted one. Even by the end of Year 3, many participants felt that they could still benefit from a mentor, provided that the mentor was effective.

- "A mentor wasn't assigned to me—I was told to find one on my own. So I didn't have one for the first month when I really needed one. I finally got assigned one, and we met a couple of times. She was open but not really welcoming."
- "The mentorship program didn't last. They hired a mentor in our district who would come and do classroom observations, but she forgot about me each time, so I never got feedback. I had to go to several meetings in order to participate, so it was a waste of time when you have so many other things to do."
- "It would be helpful to continue mentorship programs after the first year. Our district is trying to do more collaboration between schools, so mentorship could be between schools in a district."
- "In terms of mentorship, I know beginning teachers should be provided with some support. There was none at my school. I got support from the other teachers in my subject area, but an official mentor would have been helpful—a specific teacher assigned who could sit down with you regularly and ask, 'How did your week go; any issues you want to talk about; trouble you need help with?' Informal support was great, but I needed someone who was focused on my practice."
- "Mentors need to be teaching the same subject. I teach a specialized subject, and if it wasn't for mentors from other schools, I would have sunk. Need to get together with others in their field to collaborate."

- Less complex teaching assignments
- More preparation time
- Reduced expectations with respect to participating in extracurricular activities
- Opportunities to observe experienced teachers or to be observed and evaluated
- Comprehensive school and staff orientations at the beginning of or before the school year
- Assistance in setting up classrooms, writing report cards and planning professional development

The thread that pulls these various components of effective induction together appears to be recognition of the distinctive learning needs of early-career teachers. By Year 2, participants had already become engaged in an undifferentiated system of professional development that fails to distinguish between a teacher who has taught for 15 years and one who has taught for 2 years. Here's how one participant described this one-size-fits-all mentality:

> *[I was overwhelmed by] the amount of PD and collaboration that is top down. It feels like we don't even have time to prepare, and our principal is telling us what to do in terms of PD, plus all the meetings and other requirements on our time. These areas are overwhelming for new teachers when their goal is just to stay on top of their day-to-day and week-to-week planning.*

By contrast, the literature suggests that, before teachers can focus on their longer-term professional growth, they need to have their basic survival needs met by, for example, being given less complex teaching assignments and more time for planning.[21] An effective induction program should also take into account a teacher's long-term professional growth: investing time, energy and resources at the onset of a teacher's career will enable the teacher to develop expertise and leadership skills that, in time, will benefit the entire school.

There Is a Mismatch Between Teacher Supply and Demand

According to the literature, a clear relationship exists between induction experiences and improved teacher retention in the short to medium term. Working conditions, including the school's professional climate, play a significant role in determining whether teachers choose to stay or leave. However, school culture and working conditions, while important, are not the only factors that affect attrition. A significant number of new graduates are unable to find positions because their area of specialization or their geographic location does not align with market demands. Some participants reported that they accepted positions outside their area of specialization in order to secure work. By Year 3, however, a number of these teachers reported that their job satisfaction had declined because they were teaching outside their area of expertise.

By the end of Year 3, about 75 percent of participants were securely employed and their mobility was reasonably low.[22] On the other hand, about 15 per cent of participants had still not obtained contracts. Both securely employed and untenured respondents commented on the frustration involved in seeking a probationary position when the rules of the game are unclear, arbitrary or contingent upon whom one knows rather than on one's performance and skills. Some participants expressed confusion and frustration when letters of recommendation and positive evaluations from principals did not translate into job offers.

The instability of public education funding and the fact that budgets and hiring decisions are largely site based can create a gap between policy and practice when it comes to hiring practices.[23] This study and other studies of substitute teachers suggest that some new teachers fall through the cracks. For example, teachers who are unable to secure stable work in their first years may become stigmatized as failures and suffer lasting effects. Perhaps school districts should

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21. As Goddard and Foster (2001, 360) argue, "Often, it seems, we ignore or forget Maslow's hierarchy and focus solely on the growth rather than the deficiency needs of teachers."
22. From Year 1 to Year 3, over 90 per cent of the participants remained in the same school district and over 70 per cent taught in the same school. Overall, the placement stability of the sample is increasing.
23. The literature on workforce planning suggests that appropriate policies and human resources strategies can offset the effects of funding instability, policy incoherence and hiring mismatches generated by the sheer complexity of the teacher labour force (Darling-Hammond and Sykes 2003; Payzant 2004; and Smylie, Miretzky and Konkol 2005). These authors also suggest that policies are often not scrutinized in the context of new-teacher learning, leading to a perception that workforce planning is an individual rather than a collective process.

identify these teachers and implement measures that would help them either to obtain secure employment or gently exit the career.

PD Needs Vary with Stage of Mastery

No matter how many years you've been teaching, it's good to have an open mind, get feedback (ie, from a mentor). I feel I've improved a great deal already by getting feedback from others. It's keeping an open mind.

This study suggests that teachers' professional development needs are qualitatively different at different stages of mastery. Year 1 participants were clear that what they urgently required were resources, lesson and unit plans, and a sense that they were welcome in their school. They turned to mentoring relationships to have these needs met. Even participants with some experience—and therefore some skills for managing change—noted that, when faced with a different teaching assignment, what they looked for in professional development was assistance in mastering the curriculum and developing resources.

Professional development aimed at meeting these basic needs offers no guarantee that new teachers are learning core pedagogical skills, cultivating effective habits of professional learning or developing leadership capacity. In the absence of an explicit plan to develop these capacities over time, much of what is properly called induction is left to chance in the first year of teaching and abandoned altogether in subsequent years.

Teachers in Limbo

Approximately 15 per cent of Year 3 participants are still looking for secure placements. The lack of job security creates stress, but teachers are most frustrated when they can't get a fix on the rules of the game for hiring or, worse yet, when there don't appear to be any rules at all.

- "I know that, legally, schools have to post their positions, but I'd say that 85 to 100 per cent of those positions are already filled. I learned that, as in business, you have to network—it is 'who you know.' You have to work your way into it. Lots of young teachers get frustrated with this."
- "I'm worried about next year. I'm up for my continuing contract, and I'm just on edge because I don't know where I'll be."
- "I don't want to be stuck in this rut forever with maternity leave positions, temp positions. I really like it here, and this may be my last year of really getting out there and trying. I don't want to be 35 years old without a permanent position. It just doesn't feel fair. Someone who wants it so bad to have to keep subbing and never feel like you belong."
- "I don't know if this is just my district, but it would be good to know where you sit on the waiting list. Am I above people at university? Does my experience count for anything? They don't post jobs here, but it would be nice to know what is going on. It would be nice if you were recommended for probationary, if you could apply for things. I feel helpless; I can't do anything to help myself."
- "At the last minute, my district said that we might not be getting our permanent contracts. I was moving from out of province, so this was very stressful. Sent a lot of people into tailspins! One colleague was so distraught she left. All of the other school boards were picking up other teachers who weren't sure they'd have jobs."

So far, the kind of professional development that Year 1 participants rated as most valuable was that which helped them address immediate classroom needs. In some cases, participants sought out sessions on curriculum and pedagogy to assist them in developing resources, lesson plans and teaching strategies. Asked what constituted effective professional development, participants seldom mentioned the opportunity to visit other classrooms, peer observation, and sustained feedback from peers or administrators. The literature on effective teacher induction emphasizes the importance of offering integrated, multiyear programs. Accordingly, the period during which new teachers are considered "beginners" should, perhaps, be extended and the professional development offered to teachers at this level of mastery expanded to help teachers develop such long-term skills as engaging in reflective practice, carrying out research, collaborating with colleagues and preparing for leadership roles.

Conclusion

The study so far has generally confirmed what the literature has to say about the experiences of beginning teachers, the efficacy of various induction practices and the relationship between how new teachers are inducted and the professional culture of the school as a whole. The literature is clear about what needs to be done to improve the working lives of beginning teachers; how these improvements benefit the school in the long term; and what norms and practices constitute an effective, uplifting and professional school culture. In their 2009 book *The Fourth Way*, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009a) outline a clear vision for improving schools (which they regard as complex living systems), a vision that is applicable to reducing teacher attrition and supporting the professional growth of teachers in the early years of practice. In advocating for school

Embedded Professional Development

Some schools provide excellent collegial learning opportunities through PLCs and mentorship arrangements. When these opportunities are not available, teachers often seek out the relationships they need to learn and keep up their morale.

- "I enjoy PD when I can see another teacher teach, talk to peers. Going to a PD session—the 'latest and greatest'—just doesn't do it for me anymore. It's nice to hear from people active in the profession. What [inservice providers] don't understand is that you've got lots of other curriculum going on. Talking to other teachers is the best way for me to learn."

- "I've found the best thing personally for me is having time to spend with other special education teachers, bouncing ideas back and forth, learning through that dialogue. Even other special education teachers in our district. Within our school, we have a wealth of expertise, so there are quite a few 'go to' people. Sharing resources. That's the most valuable. I've gone to conferences before. They have their place but can't replace the informal PD that happens in our school. We get a little grade-alike time once a month, which is invaluable."

- "Collaboration really works. For me, one- or two-day workshops aren't the biggest help. If there's follow-up or you can work with someone, that helps. Or if you go to a conference and you come home with a box of stuff that ends up in your closet."

- "My most effective professional learning was informally through a colleague in my department who is also a young teacher but a bit ahead of me. And being able to work collaboratively with him. He's kind of an informal mentor; we collaborate and share resources. It's working with someone with similar interests in your field."

reform, the authors caution against three distractions that tend to plague all reform efforts: the path of autocracy (governance through forced compliance), the path of technocracy (excessive surveillance through growing bureaucracies and standardization) and the path of effervescence (an obsession with achieving narrow, short-term and unsustainable targets). Although the overwhelming majority of participants in this study find teaching professionally gratifying, they also point out that the culture of a school can be daunting. One respondent described her school as "a place where we run from one task to another just like airport passengers trying to catch a plane—to where we aren't even sure sometimes."

Confronted with school cultures that are unreceptive to new ideas, some early-career teachers may find themselves compromising their ideals with respect to what constitutes good practice. They may, for example, become distracted by focusing on test scores or other externally imposed compliance requirements. Other new teachers may become jaded. Such unfortunate outcomes have the effect of perpetuating the worst aspects of school culture rather than effecting changes for the better.

The amount of information that can be gleaned from short telephone interviews is limited. As a result, participants will be invited at the end of Year 4 to participate in focus groups in which they will be asked to expand on their experiences in the teaching profession. It is hoped that their responses will shed light on specific policies, practices and working conditions that help beginning teachers to grow professionally. The focus groups will also probe the issues of teacher motivation and efficacy as discussed in the emerging work of leading Canadian scholars in the field such as Klassen (Klassen et al 2009).

In the final years of the study, the researchers will continue to follow up with participants who have taken family-related leaves to determine the extent to which they have managed to achieve a balance between the demands of work and a family. The researchers will also continue to track the approximately 15 per cent of participants who have been unable to secure employment. These findings will, hopefully, guide efforts to address two challenges facing Alberta's schools: teacher workforce planning and school improvement.

Future Research Directions

Based on the study to date and a review of the literature, here are some suggestions for future research on beginning teachers in Alberta:

- Survey teacher candidates before they enter the teaching profession to better understand (1) their beliefs about learning and education, (2) their motives for entering the profession and (3) their expectations with respect to the rewards and challenges of teaching.
- Identify aspects of preservice training that specifically prepare new teachers for the range and complexity of a teacher's work.
- Examine the policies and practices of schools and school districts that might inadvertently contribute to labour market mismatches. Also document how unstable budgets affect teaching and learning conditions.
- Develop strategies to gather consistent, provincewide data on the factors that contribute to teacher shortages. This research could, for example, (1) examine the working conditions in schools with many high-needs students, rural schools and schools in geographically isolated areas; (2) determine the availability of collective agreement provisions with respect to maternity/parental leaves and family care; and (3) examine the factors that prevent teachers from specializing in such areas as English as an additional language, special education, career and technology studies, First Nations education, mathematics and science.
- Pilot a comprehensive induction program and do a follow-up study after about five years to determine if the program improved teacher retention rates, the school culture and professional learning practices.

The Big Picture

This study documents the concerns and experiences of a sample of beginning teachers in Alberta as they have either grown into the profession or chosen to leave it. It also proposes strategies to address some of the factors that may be contributing to teacher attrition.

In focusing too narrowly on the problem of early career attrition, a study of this kind runs the risk of simplifying the issues and treating them in isolation from the larger factors driving educational change. The truth is that early-career attrition is a

multifaceted phenomenon that has multiple causes and requires complex solutions.

Recently, for example, Alberta Education has been encouraging school districts to set up mentorship programs. In the simplest kind of mentorship program, a school administrator assigns a mentor to a new teacher based on his or her immediate needs. Although this strategy is perhaps better than no strategy at all, it fails to recognize the complexity of the issues facing new teachers. By themselves, mentorship programs may ignore systemic problems that exist in a school or jurisdiction.

In a more comprehensive systems approach, a mentorship program would constitute just one part of a larger induction program in which the vision and resources of the government, school districts and individual schools would be aligned. Such an approach requires not only the cooperation of teachers, school districts and professional development providers but also a long-term commitment on the part of the provincial government to fund the resources that are required to reduce teachers' workload and give them the time they need to engage in effective, ongoing professional learning.

Figure 13 attempts to illustrates how the various parts of the education system fit together in this context. Depending on the actions of the various players involved, the outcome might be change and innovation or stability and discouraging iterations of the status quo.

Examining early career teacher attrition from this broader systems perspective reveals that the problem cannot be treated in isolation from other concerns. As Figure 13 illustrates, the conditions that teachers face in their early years of practice are the product of numerous forces and players. For example, some teachers are "pulled" from the profession because the private sector and industry can offer higher salaries

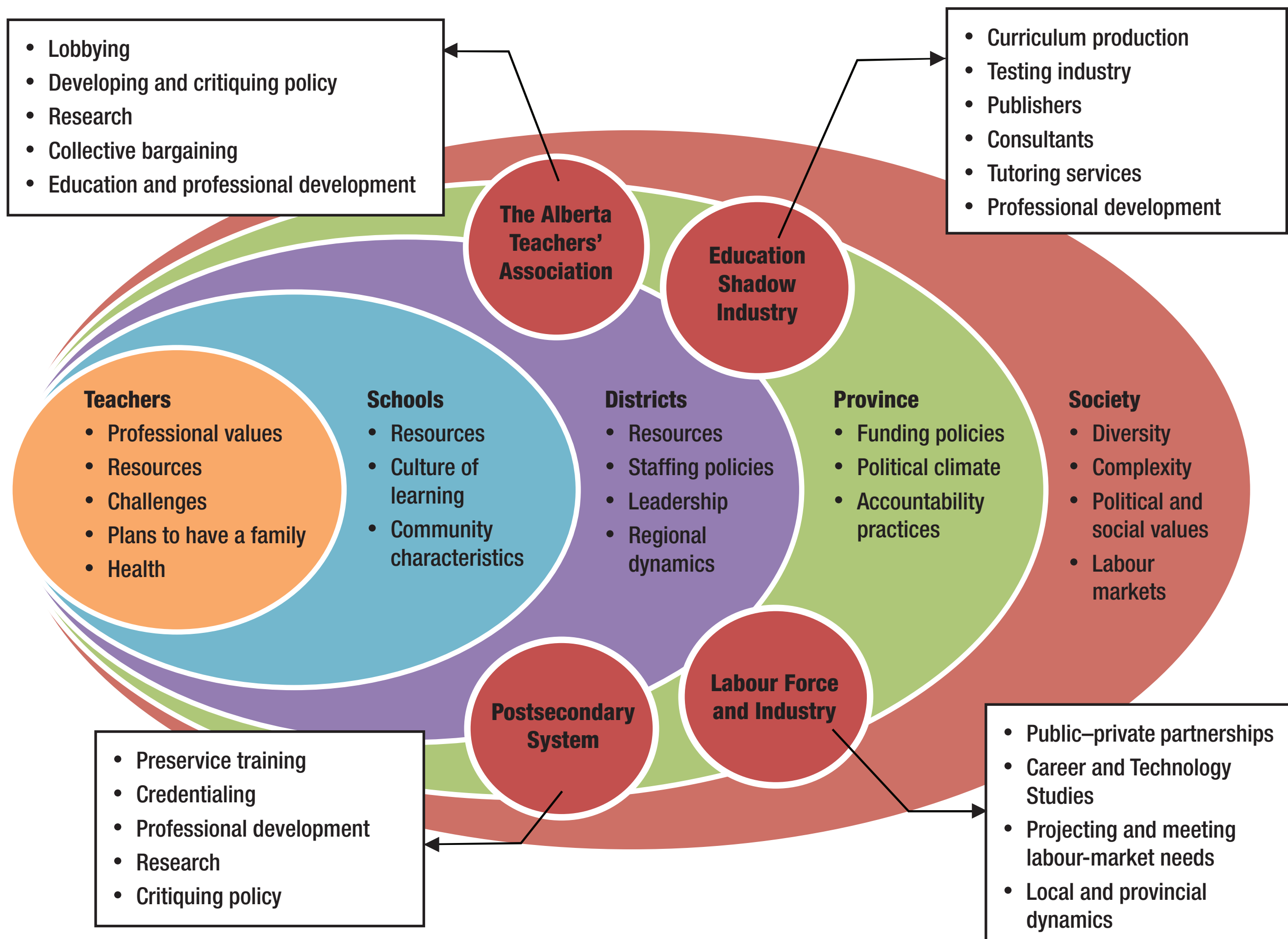

Figure 13: Beginning Teaching: A Systems Model for Alberta

and other benefits. Others are "pushed" out of the profession by such factors as large class sizes and an intensification of their work. This study also makes clear that numerous factors contribute to teachers' sense of professional identity and the career choices that they make.

The situation in Alberta with respect to reducing teacher attrition is not unlike that of a person trying to lose weight. Just as fat tissue on one part of the body cannot be reduced by exercising that area only but requires permanent changes in a person's diet and activity levels, so initiatives to improve the induction of new teachers are unlikely to be effective if they address only one aspect of the problem rather than the broader systemic issues.

Like this study on beginning teachers, Alberta Education's *Education Sector Workforce Planning: Framework for Action* (2010a) focuses on one issue facing Alberta's schools, that of teacher supply and demand. However, if implemented, the recommendations contained in that report would amount to a major overhaul of many aspects of Alberta's public education system: reforms to First Nations education and teacher training; enhanced relationships with labour and industry; better networks to support rural districts; improved professional-development support for early-career and experienced teachers; and efforts to raise public awareness about teachers and the value of public education. These goals, of course, are all laudable. Whether the political will exists to undertake these considerable tasks in collaboration with education partners remains to be seen.

Both this study of beginning teachers and the teacher workforce planning document suggest that the health of the whole system is in question. Alberta Education's *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report* (2010b) envisions seismic shifts in the structure and delivery of public education in Alberta. Improving the early career experiences of teachers requires a broad-based, renewed, and well-resourced commitment to public education in Alberta.

The changing attitudes of young teachers entering the teaching profession, coupled with the growing complexity of teachers' work, will significantly affect teachers' motivation and their overall sense of efficacy as professionals (Darling-Hammond et al 2008). Like those of their more experienced colleagues, the professional lives of early-career teachers continue to be undermined by bureaucratic government interventions in schools (Gariepy, Spencer and Couture 2009). A growing body of workplace research (Duxbury and Higgins 2001) suggests that dysfunctional organizational cultures can thrive on compliance behaviour and the acceptance of externally imposed initiatives.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009a) note that some jurisdictions become "addicted" to efforts at school reform. Such efforts typically focus on making short-term improvements and, as a result, fail to address the systemic factors that cause students to fall through the cracks. Driven by the cultural backdrop of what the authors call "the persistence of presentism," these efforts at short-term reform can cause teachers to focus their energy on satisfying externally imposed mandates (often described by catch-phrases such as "data-informed improvement") that involve teaching and learning processes that are neither desirable nor sustainable. "When schools follow policy mandates and pursue the relentless quest for short-term gains, they evolve into such addictive organizations" (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009b).

It is important to ensure that initiatives to support teachers in their early years of practice—even well-intentioned strategies such as mentorship programs—do not merely entrench dysfunctional policies or misplaced priorities. As one first-year teacher remarked, "Don't train me to deliver prepackaged lessons in my classroom. I am a dedicated teacher, and more than anything I need the ongoing support of the jurisdiction that hired me as a professional in the first place."

The Association remains committed to researching the experiences of early-career teachers and advocating for improved conditions of practice.

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Appendix A

The Year 3 Survey

1. Full Name:____
2. First Name: ____
3. Last Name: ____
4. Case ID Number: ____
5. Were you contacted in Year 3?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No
6. Your school district: ____
7. Is this the same district as you taught in during the 2008/09 school year?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No
   - ❑ N/A

   If no, why did you move? ____
8. Are you teaching at the same school as you taught at during the 2008/09 school year?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No
   - ❑ I did not have a major assignment (4 months or more) in the 2008/09 school year
   - ❑ N/A

   Comments: ____
9. Which teachers' convention do you attend?
   - ❑ Calgary City
   - ❑ Central Alberta
   - ❑ Central East
   - ❑ Greater Edmonton
   - ❑ Mighty Peace
   - ❑ North Central
   - ❑ North East
   - ❑ Palliser
   - ❑ South West
   - ❑ Southeast
   - ❑ Don't know or N/A
10. How would you describe the school(s) in which you have taught?
    - ❑ Urban
    - ❑ Smaller, semi-rural or commuter city
    - ❑ Rural
    - ❑ N/A
    - ❑ Other (please specify) ____

11. In this past year, were you employed full-time or part-time? If part-time, please indicate your FTE.
    - ❑ I was employed full-time for the whole year
    - ❑ I was employed full-time for most of the year
    - ❑ I was employed part-time for all or most of the year
    - ❑ I was a substitute teacher, or worked irregularly
    - ❑ I did not teach or N/A

12. How would you characterize your current teaching assignment?
    - ❑ ECS/Kindergarten
    - ❑ Grades 1–6
    - ❑ Grades 7–9
    - ❑ Grades 10–12
    - ❑ N/A
    - ❑ Combination (please specify) ____

13. Is this the same as or similar to the teaching assignment you had in the 2008/09 school year?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ I did not have a major assignment in the 2008/09 school year

    Comment: ____

14. To what extent have each of the following changes affected your development as a new teacher? (Choose “Not at All” if you experienced the change but it didn’t affect you. Choose N/A if you did not experience the change.)

	A Great Deal	Somewhat	Very Little	Not at All	N/A
Moving to a new school or district	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Changes in school leadership	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Changes in school funding and budgets	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

15. Explain in more depth how any of these changes affected your practice.

16. Based on your past year of experience, how would you rate the following aspects of your professional practice?

	Very High	Somewhat High	Moderate	Somewhat Low	Very Low
Confidence in your professional abilities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Level of preparedness to teach next year	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Level of professional satisfaction	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Overall stress level	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Belief that you can make a difference	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Your enthusiasm	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

17. Assess the relative impact of each of the following teaching and learning conditions on your ability to teach during the last school year:

	A very positive influence	A somewhat positive influence	Not an influence	A somewhat negative influence	A very negative influence	N/A
Size of your classes	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support for students with special needs	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Access to computers and other IT	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Access to traditional print and lesson-planning resources	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Access to professional development	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The number of different classes you had to prepare for	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Expectations to participate in extracurricular activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Overall quality of relationships with students	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Overall quality of relationships with parents and community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Comments: ____

18. As you look back on the past school year, indicate the degree to which each of the following factors helped you as a developing teacher:

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Somewhat unhelpful	Very unhelpful	N/A
Informal support from staff in my school	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Formal mentorship program (in any)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other formal professional development activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Advice from family members who are/were educators	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

19. If you were able to start a new career tomorrow with the same salary and benefits, would you do so?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ Not sure
   - ❑ No
   - ❑ N/A

   Other (specify) ____

20. Comparing this past year of teaching to previous years, would you say that your quality of life is better, worse or about the same?
   - ❑ Better
   - ❑ Worse
   - ❑ About the same
   - ❑ Other/Not Sure
   - ❑ N/A

   Comments: ____

21. Do you see teaching as a lifelong career? Is it a career you would highly recommend to others?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ Not sure
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ N/A

    Comment: ____

22. Thinking ahead to your next year of teaching, rate the importance of each of the following factors on your professional development:

	Very High Priority	A Moderate Priority	A Low Priority	Not at All a Priority
Refining and implementing my Professional Growth Plan	❑	❑	❑	❑
Taking graduate level courses for university credit	❑	❑	❑	❑
Collaborating in a professional learning community	❑	❑	❑	❑
Working with a mentor teacher	❑	❑	❑	❑
Collaborating online/at a distance or engaging in PD	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other (specify) ___________________________________	❑	❑	❑	❑

23. Did you participate in a specialist council conference this year?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Not sure/Other

    If yes, was the experience valuable? If not, why not? ____

24. To date, how have your perspectives or priorities for professional development changed? What matters? What doesn't

25. What was your most effective PD experience this past year and why was it effective?

26. Looking ahead to the next five years, are you planning to temporarily interrupt your teaching career to pursue other activities or interests?
    - ❑ Definitely Yes
    - ❑ Maybe
    - ❑ Definitely No
    - ❑ N/A

    Comment: ____

27. Have your plans for the next five years changed from what you indicated last year?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Other/Not Sure
    - ❑ N/A

    If yes, why did your plans change?____

28. Based on what you know today, what sort of teaching position do you expect to have next year? (Choose all descriptors that apply).

❑ A position in my current district	❑ A part-time position	❑ A probationary position
❑ A position in another district	❑ A temporary contract position	❑ Substitute teaching
❑ A full-time position	❑ A continuing position	❑ Other (please describe) ______________________________

29. If this is a new position for you, why are you moving?

30. In what way(s) do you feel that you are still developing as a teacher?

31. Now that you have been teaching for three years, do you have any thoughts or observations on high attrition rates for beginning teachers?

32. Do you have any questions, concern or comments about the services provided by the ATA?
    - ❑ Maternity Leave or N/A
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Comment: ____

33. Are there any other important issues that you'd like to comment on that weren't addressed in this survey?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
    - ❑ Maternity Leave or N/A
    - ❑ Comment: ____

This publication is part of an ongoing series of research updates published by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Further background information about the research studies cited in this publication is available from J-C Couture at the Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1; phone 780 447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta); e-mail jc.couture@ata.ab.ca.

PD-86-19 2011 04