I remember vividly the day I dropped off my first application to teach. The school district's secretary barely looked up as she mumbled, “Someone will be in touch ...” I walked to my car, dejected, and suddenly stopped in my tracks. “No!” I said out loud to no one. “I want a teaching job!” I turned, walked back in, and adamantly told the secretary I wanted to talk to someone who could give me a job. She pointed to a room where all the high school principals were meeting, and I stood and waited to pounce on the first one who came out the door.

I got the job.

I was 21. I had on a sundress. Fast forward 37 years, and I don’t even know who that courageous young teacher was. The confidence I exhibited when I announced as that meeting door opened, “I want a job!” dwindled away on the first day of school when a senior stood before me and challenged my teaching expertise.

He was right. I didn’t know what I was doing. But as a novice teacher, I never thought my struggles with classroom management or curriculum facilitation were a result of a lack of support or training; I was pretty sure all the problems I had back then lay somewhere deep inside myself.

But now we know that beginning teachers are more successful (and confident) when they are supported. There are now policies in place that were unheard of back then—beginning teachers are assigned mentors, professional development on classroom management is provided, there are professional learning communities for novice teachers to collaborate, discussion boards are available, and for goodness sake, the internet is MAGICAL! I had none of those opportunities when I started.

Preparation Gaps
Currently, I work as a Regional Education Facilitator in North Carolina offering support to the state's beginning teachers. As such, I have often thought about my own first years of teaching and wondered about the dispositions of our current beginning teachers; how do they feel about the support they receive?

So ... I asked them.

I sent out a survey to 100 teachers in their first three years in the classroom. I asked them one question: "What information did you need prior to teaching that you weren’t given?" Their responses varied, but most fell into two big (and important) categories:

1) They didn’t come prepared to deal with the paperwork.
"Why didn’t my university tell me about papers? Papers in my box, papers that need to be returned, papers that need to be sent to parents, papers that need to be graded? I can’t stay on top of it. ... I’m drowning in papers. ...”

2) They didn’t come prepared to teach students with special needs.
“What about the ones who don’t have an IEP, the ones who aren’t identified through the special education program? I have students who are angry, depressed, confrontational, and with attention problems. They aren’t identified, so I don’t know where to start. ...”
“What about students whose first language isn’t English? I don’t know if they struggle in reading because of the language barrier, or if they also struggle reading books written in their native language!”

So what kind of advice could I give these teachers? What could I pull from my own years of teaching as well as from my current work?
It almost sounds too simple, but it’s a little tip I call “Circle the Wagons.” Simply asking for help is a strategy that some beginning teachers don’t use enough (or at all). Struggling with finding the time to reach out, while often working in isolation, can make it difficult to establish meaningful relationships in a school. But a mentor-teacher, whether officially assigned or through a natural relationship that develops due to close proximity on the school hallway, can share management tips on keeping up with paperwork. Of course, online tools offer answers to many organizational questions so the technology facilitator is a possible resource as well.

In addition, calling on the experts like the counselor, school psychologist, ESL teacher, behavior specialist, special education directors—at the school and district levels—is necessary when there are questions about strategies for at-risk students. And simply talking to (and observing) other teachers who have taught the same students in the past, or who also teach them now, can provide the direction a struggling teacher needs.

**The X Factor: Administrative Support**

But the one thing teachers didn’t mention in the survey—the one thing I hear them talk about almost daily—has to do with the leader of that wagon train. Research shows it has the most impact on teacher retention, and it’s two simple words: administrative support. A quick internet search will provide numerous articles and dissertations on the subject of principal support for teachers, but I don’t need the written word to tell me what I’ve seen for myself through the years.

School administrators can impact the retention of their beginning teachers by offering support in these ways:

- **Being accessible.** Can I walk to his/her office door and have a quick word?
- **Being instructional.** Is he/she sharing strategies that help me be a better teacher in my classroom?
- **Being protective.** Does he or she “have my back” if a parent is angry or a student is disrupting class?
- **Being communicative.** Am I always aware of what’s going on, or do I hear things first from students or from the community?

And principals who really support their beginning teachers take it a step further. They are open about acknowledging that the teacher is just starting out. A simple, “I know you’re new at this ... how can I help you?” is so meaningful and can make a huge difference.

Administrators should also consider providing school-level meetings and celebrations for beginning teachers. Supporting a professional learning community of new teachers adds a layer of encouragement and camaraderie that can make those first years bearable. And recognizing those newest to our profession for even small victories in the classroom is another way to impact retention. A note in the teacher’s box, a quick email, and a shout out at a faculty meeting are free and easy ways to make a difference.

Last week I saw an excited beginning teacher in the hallway of a high school. After some conversation, she said, “When I first started working here, I said the one thing I really wanted was support from my principal. I was right. This job is hard, but knowing he’s my biggest cheerleader makes me want to work even harder!”

As beginning teachers have told me, though, we hope their principals are also there to share strategies for managing paperwork and to provide support for teaching special populations of students. They are, after all, the leaders of the wagon train.

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http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2016/06/07/what-do-beginning-teachers-really-need.html?tkn=YQTD5%2B40Ej2Fd90M4R0MWLr151Mfqzx2lW&print=1