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The CADRE Project: A Retention Study

This article describes the findings of a study of teacher retention and the effectiveness of one induction program, the Career Advancement and Development for Recruits and Experienced teachers (CADRE) Project, in helping teachers remain in the profession. National statistics report teacher attrition rate to be 40 percent over five years. CADRE participants have a retention rate of 89 percent over five years.

The issue of teacher induction has received significant attention from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and metropolitan area school districts for over a decade. Several collaborative programs have been developed and implemented: The Beginning Teacher Project, the MOEC Mentor Project, and the CADRE Project. Significant to the impact of teacher induction efforts is the effect on teacher retention. This study focused on teacher retention rates of the CADRE Project participants.

The CADRE Project, which began in 1994, is a nationally recognized graduate

induction program for beginning teachers and a professional renewal program for experienced teachers. CADRE (Career Advancement and Development for Recruits and Experienced teachers) resulted from a strong collaborative relationship between the College of Education and area school districts organized under the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC). The overriding goal of the project is to develop quality educators through a collaborative effort of growth and renewal.

The Project offers newly certified teachers an opportunity to spend their first year of teaching supported by a university graduate program and by carefully selected teachers, CADRE Associates, who become their mentors. The goal of the project is for new teachers to have a successful first year that includes a variety of professional learning experiences and speeds up their attainment

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of a level of professional skill and judgment that characterizes a well-qualified teacher.

Each CADRE Associate mentors two CADRE Teachers, an assignment that takes up about one-fourth of their time. Half of their time is spent at their district's discretion, working on a variety of projects that address district needs. The remaining one-fourth of their time supports university efforts.

In June 2000, the CADRE Project expanded to include CADRE II: The Arts. This program supports the use of art as a vehicle for teaching the content areas as well as enhancing student understanding and appreciation of the various arts.

Success in the implementation of the project is a shared responsibility of the college, the school districts, and the CADRE Project participants. The CADRE Project offers a synthesis of theory and practice, with the intention of creating and crossing the bridge between university and pre-service preparation as well as providing opportunities for growth and development for practicing professionals.

When the CADRE Project began in 1994, employment opportunities for educators were highly competitive. To attract top candidates to the program, CADRE offered education graduates a greater chance for employment as well as an opportunity for an advanced degree. Today, as older teachers begin to retire in large numbers and student enrollment numbers begin a decade-long rise, a teacher shortage is emerging.¹ The current demand for teachers, which significantly favors the applicant, creates a potential challenge for the CADRE Project as they continue efforts to attract the number and caliber of candidates that has been essential to the success of the program.

Methodology

To address the impact CADRE has on teacher retention and current concerns about continuing to attract highly qualified candi-

dates, two surveys were issued through the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Education.

The first survey, taken at the culmination of their CADRE experience, asked 36 CADRE Teachers to identify their reasons for participating in the CADRE Project. They were asked to rank a list of reasons from most important to least important.

A second survey was sent out to former CADRE Teachers. The focus of this survey was to determine the level of teacher retention, additional training and/or education, and status of tenure for CADRE Teachers. Of the 155 former CADRE Teachers, 117 (75 percent) were successfully contacted and returned their surveys.

Results of the Surveys

Reasons for First-Year Teacher Participation.

Survey 1 identifies earning an advanced degree as the most important motivation for choosing to participate in the CADRE Project. Mentoring support, improvement of teaching skills, and salary increase are identified as equally important second reasons. Third, is the benefit of a cohort group.

These results imply that the opportunity for advanced degree work is the primary factor attracting candidates. Earning an advanced degree in 15 months brings with it a significant increase in salary relatively early in one's teaching career. This suggests that first-year teachers may have concerns about financial compensation and that the CADRE Project is a good way to address the issue. Earning the advanced degree also brings with it the opportunity to make the transition from theory to practice while continuing to advance one's repertoire of best practices and improvement of teaching skills, which was a second reason offered for CADRE Participation.

The CADRE Project will continue to administer surveys to determine the reasons participants choose an intensive induction

program such as CADRE. Ongoing data collection will provide information about the priorities and trends of beginning teachers as they enter the job market. It will also help to inform program administrators as they recruit and select program participants.

Influence on Teacher Retention.

It is estimated that about 30 percent of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years and that almost 40 percent, and especially the most academically talented, leave the profession within their first five years of teaching.²⁻⁵ These alarming statistics give rise to the question of whether teachers who participate in the CADRE Project stay in the profession or if they, too, are prone to leaving the profession within the first five years.

The results of Survey 2 indicate that CADRE Teachers are staying in the profession. Of the 117 CADRE Teachers who responded to the survey, 89 percent (104 teachers) are still teaching; 62 percent of the participants are teaching in the same district in which they completed their CADRE teaching experience; and 14 percent of the participants are teaching outside the metro area.

Only 11 percent of the CADRE participants are no longer teaching. The survey sought to identify reasons these former CADRE Teachers have for leaving the profession. One-third of the respondents indicated that raising a family was the primary reason. Other reasons include taking a leave of absence and changing to a career in business. One respondent listed his/her reason for leaving the profession as being unhappy with the profession.

Of the 102 CADRE teachers who are still in the classroom, 48 percent have continued their education since the CADRE experience by additional training, endorsements, and/or degrees in areas such as English as a Second Language (ESL), technology, Reading Recovery, Education Administration,

and content area training. It appears reasonable to assume that the investment of time and money to complete additional professional coursework and training may contribute to ongoing retention of these teachers.

Because of its significance in the area of retention, tenure was an additional factor examined in this study. Most of the school districts involved with CADRE require three years of district-contracted, successful teaching before tenure status is offered. CADRE participants complete their CADRE experience under a university contract, so the first district-contract year occurs following the CADRE experience. Survey results show that 47 former CADRE Teachers have earned tenure; 52 have not been in their current district long enough to earn tenure; and 16 responses were unclear in regard to the status of tenure. It is a logical assumption that achieving tenure has a positive impact on a teacher's decision to stay in education.

Professional Recognition of CADRE Teachers.

Respondents were invited to list honors, awards or special recognition they have received for education. Among the various honors and awards bestowed upon CADRE Teachers were: National Geographic Teacher Award, District Outstanding Teacher of the Year, Sallie Mae First Year Teacher Award, Disney Teacher of the Year nominations, and various grants or special funding for programs developed by the teachers.

The CADRE Experience in the Words of the Teachers.

The survey invited CADRE Teachers to provide input about the personal and professional impact of participating in the CADRE Project. Those offering their insights enthusiastically supported CADRE as one of the pivotal experiences of their professional, and often personal, lives.

Some of the comments were as follows:

"I feel that CADRE helped me become a good teacher... because of the mentor help that (is provided). If it wasn't for my mentor, I would have been lost."

"There is so much to learn (during the) first year that it is a crime that all first year teachers aren't provided with a true mentor."

"I think (CADRE) has helped me to stand out in our district. (The districts) expect a lot of CADRE teachers and expect us to live up to (the reputation of CADRE)."

"CADRE provided the stability necessary for the compacted year. We did not need to worry about registrations, payments for classes, schedules, etc. (The program director) was always available for our multitude of questions. Because of this program, CADRE Teachers have a great advantage. Not only do we attain our Master's Degree early in our careers, which is becoming mandatory in many school districts, but we have developed friendships, resources, and knowledge (unique) to the CADRE Project."

Two responses were negative in nature, citing lack of building and/or mentor support as reasons for unhappiness with the program.

Participants identified the personal and professional benefits of participating in a cohort group as significant to their commitment to a career in education. Historically, teaching is a profession where much work occurs in isolation from colleagues. More recently, however, teaching is being encouraged as a collaborative endeavor. Studying the effects of cohort groups in the induction process, and in the area of retention, is worthy of further study.

Implications

The data suggest that CADRE Teachers often pursue education and/or training beyond their CADRE experience. Anec-

dotal evidence offered by the respondents indicates that CADRE Teachers found the CADRE experience professionally and personally enriching. For the participating districts, there are vital advantages to participating in the CADRE Project; Metropolitan area school districts have the opportunity to employ master teachers at the conclusion of each year of participation. These quality teachers tend to stay in the profession and in their CADRE district. Veteran teachers benefit through the opportunity to learn and apply mentoring strategies and the opportunity to experience aspects of education beyond those available to a classroom teacher. The University of Nebraska at Omaha also benefits in that a direct connection to the schools promotes the kind of communication and coordination that results in addressing the ever-changing field of education. Δ

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