

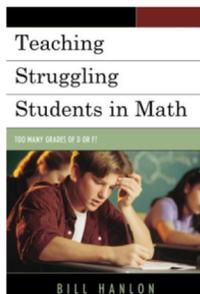
Nevada Public Education News



Teaching Experience Really Does Matter!

Bill Hanlon

It shouldn't surprise anyone to know that schools identified as chronically underperforming are being staffed by a lot of first year teachers. These are the schools being identified by the Governor as possibly being placed into the newly proposed *Achievement District*.



In Nevada, first year teachers, by policy and practice, are regularly placed in schools with students with the greatest needs. We see these first year teachers struggle to maintain control of classes with upwards of 37 students in their classes. Who are these first year teachers? They typically come from universities, alternative routes to teacher licensure, and Teach for America.

These first year teachers do not know or have instructional strategies that will help their students learn. These first year teachers clearly do not have resources to use to support their non-existent strategies. One of the biggest difficulties first year teachers face is classroom management. Making sure they have a classroom conducive to learning.

Many first year teachers will complain their students are not learning – not doing their work. I'd ask, "how are you helping the students to remember information?" Blank looks often result. They would often respond, I taught it and students are supposed to study. As an example, I was working with 5 first year teachers at a school, they were complaining that their students could not keep terms involving functions straight in their heads, always mixing them up. I suggested they tell the students many of these terms they were concerned about could be written alphabetically to help their students remember. Using the ordered pair (x, y), show them how each set of terms corresponded to the ordered pair (x, y) and are also in alphabetical order; (horizontal axis, vertical axis), (domain, range), (input, output), and (abscissa, ordinate). That simple suggestion makes it easier for students to remember and not get new terms mixed up.

At another school, first year teachers were working with students on evaluating algebraic expressions. The expressions they were using were nonsense expressions - expressions that had no meaning except for practice. I suggested they use formulas that benefit students; $2l + 2w$, lw , $\frac{1}{2}(B+b)h$, $\frac{1}{2}bh$, prt , $b^2 - 4ac$, etc.. By using those formulas as algebraic expressions, they could either review formulas the students were already expected to know while learning to evaluate algebraic expressions or they could introduce how to find answers to formulas that will be

introduced at a later date that results in kids getting a leg up on new learning. Either way, it helps students learn, be successful.

Experienced teachers use simple, straight-forward examples that work, that clarify instruction, that are not variations, that don't bog students down in arithmetic when introducing new concepts or skills to ensure student understanding of the concept being taught. Inexperienced teachers, first year teachers, use whatever exercises are in the book - some of those exercises can actually distract the students from the math to be learned.

These suggestions are not earth shattering, they are suggestions that are meant to help students learn. First year teachers just don't have knowledge of these things, experience does matter for your child. Educational research and common sense tells us that. In still another study released this week indicated that teachers' performance improves over time. The latest study indicates that teachers continue to improve their instructional practices upwards of 12 years. And those experienced teachers better motivate their students which results in lower absentee rates, less classroom distractions and increased student achievement.

Placing first year teachers with students who are already experiencing difficulty is pretty short-sighted. But, not only are we, as a state, doing this, it has become policy and practice because we have a teacher shortage.

We should be taking these first year teachers whether they come from regular colleges of education, alternative routes of teacher licensure or Teach for America and place them where they can be successful – not at schools already struggling. Struggling students need good experienced teachers, teachers who have the content knowledge, instructional and assessment strategies, as well as resources and classroom management skills that keep students on task and not further distracted..

We can see the shortsightedness of these issues in schools, many of the schools the state has just identified as chronically underperforming and will be placed in the *Achievement District* are using Teach for America graduates, teachers from alternative routes and first year teachers from colleges of education. Many new teachers treat the schools serving high numbers of at risk students with a revolving door mentality, they get a couple of years of experience and move to what might be considered a better school or community. It's difficult to develop a culture of success when there is a great deal of staff turnover.

I don't know anyone across this nation that would recommend placing first year teachers with the students with the greatest needs. But, that seems to be the policy and practice in Nevada. Is it any wonder why these students are not meeting expectations, why their schools are chronically underperforming? While we want our students to succeed, we adults are going to have to smarten up first.

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