

INTRODUCTION

As any building administrator who has new teachers in his/her building knows, the State of Connecticut has developed a nationally recognized induction program for beginning teachers entitled the BEST Program. This Beginning Educator Support and Training Program, as the label implies, includes support but also includes the assessment of new staff. The program is culminated by evaluating the beginning teacher's demonstration of mastery of the essential teaching competencies related to content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment. Since 1999, the State assesses this mastery "through a discipline-specific teaching portfolio submitted during the second year of teaching, in which the beginning teachers document a unit of instruction around important concepts or goals. In their portfolios, teachers describe a series of lessons, analyze student work, videotape two different teaching occasions, and reflect on their students' learning and the quality of their teaching."

The portfolio is assessed in four categories: Instructional Design, Instructional Implementation, Assessment of Learning, and Analyzing Teaching and Learning. The assessment of each portfolio consists of collecting and recording data through note-taking, interpreting the patterns found in the evidence, and evaluating the quality of the teaching documented in the portfolio. The score is based on the expert judgment of a highly trained scorer or scorers, who refer to benchmark performances and the professional standards (CCT) to make their judgment.

Beginning teachers who do not meet the portfolio performance standard are provided with additional individual feedback and a personal conference and have the opportunity to submit another portfolio during their third year in the BEST program.

In 2001, the State Department of Education distributed scoring rubrics to the beginning teachers before they began the portfolio process. This was done for two reasons:

- a. the teaching practices reflected in the rubrics represent many of the daily expectations for essential teaching competencies related to content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment and are based on the CCT,

- b. the beginning teacher should internalize these expectations and be performing them daily as routine and not just as preparation for the portfolio assignment.

Now that all districts as well as university Departments of Education have access to these rubrics, it has spotlighted additional problems: The current support personnel in the schools and at the district level are not all familiar with the expectations therein. Moreover, if the standards truly represent the daily expectations for essential teaching competencies for all teachers, then all teachers should be aware of these high standards and be effective in implementing them regularly. Likewise, faculty in teacher preparation institutions need to focus on the content in the rubrics as well as the CCT in their courses.

As a result, the authors feel that two new functions for the BEST program have emerged- to make these rubrics of excellent teaching:

- a. the foundation upon which local districts establish their teacher evaluation and professional development plans and,

- b. an integral part of the curriculum in teacher preparation programs in state universities and colleges.

In order to improve both the initial training and the support team for the beginning teacher, the authors have conceptualized and have initiated steps in two arenas: a school initiative within an elementary school and the teacher preparation program at Sacred Heart University.