

Public Abstract

First Name:Donald

Middle Name:G.

Last Name:Scott

Adviser's First Name:Sandy

Adviser's Last Name:Hutchinson

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:Retention of Early Career Teachers Engaged in Missouri's Career Education Mentoring Program

Nationally, teacher attrition continues to contribute to a shortage of qualified teachers in public education classrooms. Current research has identified factors leading to attrition including lack of administrative support, teacher retirement, student population increases, and classroom policies indicating education stakeholders needed to attract, support, and retain new teachers. To address the attrition of new career education teachers in Missouri, the Career Education Mentoring Program was established to provide structured program area content, guidance, and support for new and returning teachers as they become integrated into the social cultures of their institutions. The ongoing development, enhancement, and sustainability of the CE Mentoring Program continue to be topics of interest for program framers, administrators and participants.

A two-phase multiple methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to research was applied to this study. The quantitative phase investigated two groups of career education teachers who participated in the CE Mentoring Program. Retention rates were established for the two groups of program participants; those participating in the two-year program ending the spring of 2006, and the spring of 2007. As a means of comparing groups who went through the program and those who did not, retention rates were developed for two additional groups, non-Career Education teachers to serve as a baseline and career education teachers who did not participate in the program.

During the qualitative phase, personal interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of twenty (20) CE Mentoring Program participants who volunteered to participate in the study. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide further investigation into the connections made between interviewees' program experiences, satisfaction with teaching as a career, and to the negative and positive precipitating factors that may have influenced their decision to either stay or leave the teaching profession.

The findings for this study revealed that retention rates for the two groups of CE Mentoring Program participants investigated exceeded those for the baseline group, and for Career Education teachers who did not select the CE Mentoring Program as their option to meet state mentoring requirements. Overall, satisfaction with the program was high on measures of classroom usability of the information gleaned from program participation.

Despite having specified problems with accountability and programmatic considerations, when posed with the prospect of not having the CE Mentoring Program available as an option to meet mentoring requirements, all 20 of the interviewed teachers (100%) identified a need for both the statewide CE Mentoring Program and in-district programs to meet their needs as new teachers. Interview data provided by study participants positioned the CE Mentoring Program as a contributor to increased retention rates and an essential provider of career education program content, expertise, and the mentorship needed by new and returning teachers to be successful in the classroom.