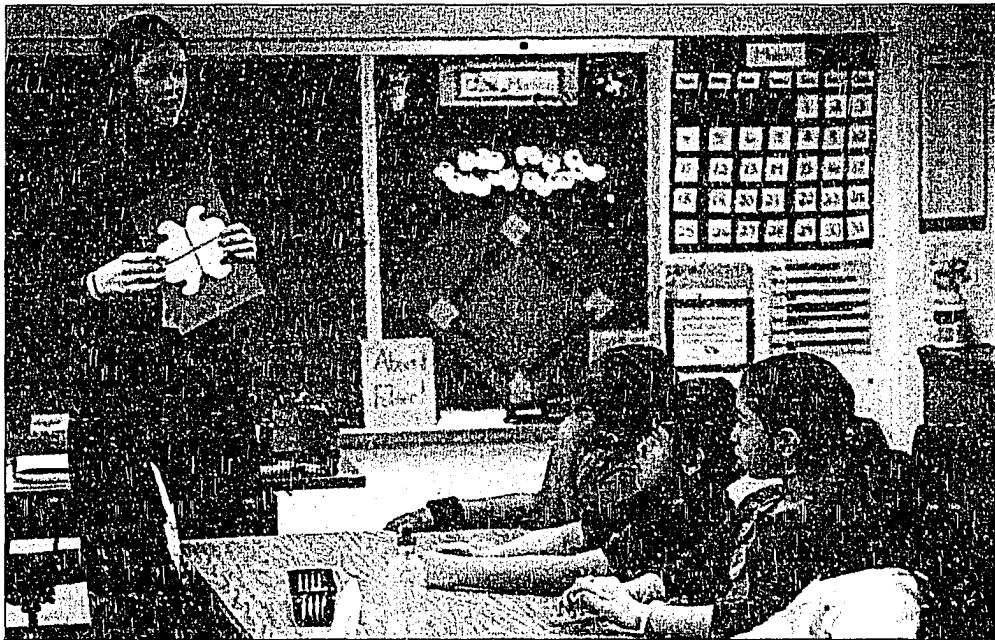


A New Teacher's Work Is Never Done: Preparing Lessons From Scratch ...

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BY TOGA ALLEN—THE WASHINGTON POST

First-year teacher Kerry Brown, pictured with her fifth-graders at Abingdon Elementary in Arlington, frequently works 12 to 15 hours a day.

A New Teacher's Work Is Never Done

Preparing Lessons From Scratch Leaves Little Time for a Personal Life

One in six teachers in the area's schools are new to their schools or to the profession. See today's Metro section for a regional look at the issue.

By JAY MATHEWS
Washington Post Staff Writer

Kerry Brown discovered late last summer when she started at Abingdon Elementary School that, as a first-year teach-

er, her job is her life.

She arrives at her fifth-grade classroom at the south Arlington school between 6:30 and 7:30 each morning, long before her 19 students get there. She leaves between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.—“depending on how exhausted I am,” she said.

She spends an additional five to eight hours in her living room on Saturdays and Sundays preparing the worksheets, overheads, quizzes, tests, homework and a doz-

en other things on which her success depends.

It is like that for most new teachers, and Abingdon has more than its share of those. About 15 percent of the faculty this year are novices, compared to the area-wide average of about 7 percent.

Abingdon Principal Miguel Ley says he has to be ready when surges of retirements

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Mentors Help New Teachers Adjust to the Classroom

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and transfers put unusually high numbers of new teachers in his school. He said he likes the energy and enthusiasm rookie teachers bring to the school, but they also need a great deal of extra help.

"In August, new teachers come in the week before the rest of the teachers," said Linda Erdos, spokeswoman for Arlington schools. "They receive an extensive orientation from personnel and the division of instruction. This year, we are adding extra time specifically for new teachers who have not [done student teaching]."

A Washington Post survey of Washington-area public school principals found unusually large numbers of first-year teachers and teachers who are new to their schools.

Arlington and Alexandria were the only two districts that did not participate in the survey. They declined to provide data about individual schools.

Arlington Superintendent Robert G. Smith and Alexandria Superintendent Herbert M. Berg said they declined because they thought it would take too much time and because they had concerns about how the information would be used.

(The survey results are being used only in news stories and school-by-school guides on The Post's Web site, www.washingtonpost.com.)

School officials did provide some districtwide statistics and talked about how they help inexperienced faculty.

Alexandria school officials said 4 percent of the district's teachers for the 1999-2000 school year were beginners.

In the 1999-2000 school year, 16 percent of Arlington's 1,119 teachers were new to the school system. The number of new teachers was 179, a significant jump from 140 the year before and a sign that teacher turnover is rising in Arlington as it is in much of the country.

About 80 Arlington teachers — 7.1 percent of the total and 45 percent of teachers new to the school system—had fewer than four years of experience in 1999-2000, Erdos said.

"All new teachers are required to attend a new-teacher course that meets throughout the year," Erdos said. For the first time, she said, first-year teachers are required to attend the monthly sessions. Most new teachers are also assigned a mentor who has been trained to help newcomers.

"The preliminary results are very positive," Erdos said. "Of the first 25 mentors to return their surveys, 21 want to serve as mentors again next year."

Lois Berlin, principal of George Mason Elementary School in Alexandria, said none of her 28 teachers this year are beginners, although she hired two people new to teaching in 1999 and two in 1998.

The most important thing a principal can do for a new teacher

is to give her a good mentor, she said. "I also need to support teachers in discipline and classroom management," she said. "Those are probably the two toughest areas for new teachers. Their student teaching didn't prepare them to walk in and get it all together for a new year with their very own class."

Brown says she strongly agrees. She was first inspired to become a teacher when, as a teenager in Upstate New York, she saw the excited looks of younger girls she taught to twirl a baton. In her fifth-grade class, she said she loves "watching their faces as they begin to grasp a concept."

But creating that atmosphere when you have never done it before is a lot of work, she said. When she is not preparing lessons in her classroom or at home, she is talking to her mentor or attending the county classes for new teachers.

"Even spending 12 to 15 hours a day at work," she said, "I feel as though I have so much more to do."



BY TOM ALLEN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Novice teacher Kerry Brown says it is hard work creating the right atmosphere for her classroom.