

Education & Technology

Motivating The Teachers Of Today For The Students Of Tomorrow

(NAPSA)—Each year, thousands of students toss their caps into the sky and celebrate the start of their career as educators. Fast forward five years and it's predicted that nearly 50 percent of those will have left the job.

What happens in those five years to turn fired-up graduates away from the profession they dedicated so much effort and passion towards? Education leaders around the world are seeking an answer to the conundrum, and are turning to an unexpected solution: social networks.

A study from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development revealed a common set of challenges among its 34 member nations: attracting qualified graduates to the field of teaching and preventing current teachers from moving on to greener pastures.

So what's behind this trend? Among the biggest contributors is the challenging work environment of the classroom.

Laura Rahn, an award-winning 4th grade teacher in California's Mountain View Elementary School, has been teaching for 23 years. After all these years of experience, one of Rahn's biggest challenges is managing her schedule and the constant workload—an issue she says is even more pronounced for teachers during their first few years in the classroom. Without peer support, new educators struggle to find ways to balance their work and life.

Says Rahn, "Each year, I wonder how I'll get everything done. Networking with other teachers has always been a great source of innovative ways to stay ahead of all the paperwork and grading that go with being an elementary school teacher."



Today's technology lets teachers reach out to students around the world.

To help stem the tide of teacher attrition, education and government leaders are investing in resources that improve collaboration between teachers and give them access to more resources. For example, in 2009 the Netherlands' Ministry of Education, Culture and Science built an Internet-based portal called Wikiwijs (or "Wikiwise"). Available for educators from the primary to university levels, Wikiwijs helps them create, share and freely use open educational resources. In its first two years, more than 1 million lesson plans, tests and other classroom exercises have been uploaded to the Wikiwijs library.

Companies such as Microsoft are also helping. For more than 20 years, the Redmond, WA-based software company has been working with educators and government officials at all levels to help students acquire the skills they need for work and life. Empowering teachers is a natural outgrowth of that commitment.

"Microsoft firmly believes technology can play a significant role in the classroom, but the fate of education remains in the teacher's ability to engage students," says Anthony Salcito, vice president of worldwide education at Microsoft. "Through

our many partnerships and programs, our goal is to improve educational outcomes for both students and educators, and have a real impact in the classroom."

Two years ago, Microsoft launched the Partners in Learning Network, a global online community that brings together 4 million educators in 36 languages. Like Wikiwijs, the Partners in Learning Network provides teachers with a forum for sharing the best practices and classroom materials, and making connections that enrich their careers and their classrooms.

The Partners in Learning Network has benefited veteran teachers such as Rahn, as well as those who are early in their career. For Jerker Porat, a teacher from Örebro, Sweden, the biggest contributor to teacher attrition is the classroom routine that tends to seep in over time.

"Technology has allowed me to avoid that trap by sharing good ideas and by picking up someone else's good ideas and making them my own," said Porat.

Through Partners in Learning, Porat has developed a network of colleagues that help "break the walls" of his classroom, allowing him to take his students on a worldwide journey by building networks with classrooms in other countries.

Says Porat: "With the Partners in Learning Network, I found engaged teachers who wanted to share their ideas and were open for international collaboration. Not only has it helped me grow as a teacher, but I've received inspiration from all over the world!"

For more information about the Partners in Learning Network, visit www.pil-network.com.