



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Preparing materials for the upcoming Reassigned Teachers workshops are Barbara Potter (left), Linda Stillwater, Maude Donahue and Alice Williston. All teachers who have changed assignments, they work year round with fellow workers in the same situation.

## Shuffled teachers get help with new classrooms

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

There's a skill to getting kindergartners to line up. But it's a detail you don't worry about with older students. So lining up is something that often trips up experienced teachers when they move from the upper grades to working with younger children. "They tell them to line up and nothing happens," explained Barbara Potter, who heads Oakland Schools Reassigned Teachers Program. "But lining up has lots of stages to it, depending on age."

AS SCHOOL districts lose enrollment and funds, each fall more teachers are reassigned to new subject areas and grade levels.

Even though they're certified to teach several subjects, it's not easy to move from junior high math to fourth grade art. Or switch from sixth grade English to teaching first graders how to write.

And the change can take a toll, re-

sulting in illness or even early retirement.

"MANY PEOPLE grow through the experience and become better teachers," said Alice Williston, who voluntarily went from teaching kindergarten to fourth grade when Southfield closed five schools.

"But it's more difficult than I thought it would be. Some people just don't adjust."

When it was set up four years ago to head off problems which could result from moving teachers, the intermediate district's Reassigned Teachers Program served five Oakland County districts — Berkley, Birmingham, Ferndale, Oak Park and Southfield.

Now its services are available to all teachers in the county. Potter has also helped set up programs in other areas like the Wayne-Westland district, where she trained 10 other teachers (called peer facilitators) to help reassigned co-workers.

"DISTRICTS BEGAN to realize they need to provide help to shuffled teachers can be effective teaching new areas," explained Potter, who has a doctorate in educational administration from the University of Michigan.

Federally funded for \$40,000 this year, the program's main activity is a series of workshops for reassigned teachers. This year they will be Aug. 18 and 19 in Oakland Schools, Pontiac.

It will clue teachers in on what kinds

of experiences they may encounter, as well as give them practical tips on how to start the year right.

ONE GOAL is to give reassigned teachers a positive outlook on what they may consider a personal disaster.

Potter said many teachers work for years to get a job teaching certain subjects or grade levels. And they are disappointed and bitter when they're moved to a new area.

"In the United States over the past 20 years, people felt if they worked hard at a job the sky was the limit. But that's no longer true," explained the Birmingham resident. "So they feel they have no control over their careers."

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