

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers-Administrators [AII-01]

The Challenges of Inclusion and Collaboration

Understanding the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers

Briefly...

Understanding the challenges that novice special education teachers encounter provides important information for administrators as they consider policies and procedures that support new teacher induction. Find out how administrators can help novice special education teachers address the challenges they face with inclusion, collaboration, and interactions with other adults.

Learning to interact with other adults in a positive and productive manner is an important dimension of learning to teach. Novice special education teachers rely on others for support as they navigate the school culture, learn policies and procedures, and work to solve problems.

Although interactions with adults can be helpful, they also can be challenging. Novice special education teachers are more likely to stay in teaching when they feel supported and part of the school community. Problematic interactions and communication may lead to perceptions of poor school climate, a factor associated with special education teacher turnover.

An understanding of novice special education teachers' concerns can help administrators prepare mentors and plan more relevant induction programs. This Brief looks at these teachers' concerns related to inclusion, collaboration with general education teachers, and interactions with other adults. It offers some suggestions that administrators might use to help new teachers succeed.

Concerns: Inclusion and Collaboration

Novice special education teachers generally work with general education

teachers to ensure that students with disabilities have access to and make progress in the general education curriculum. Becoming a part of the school community and negotiating inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes is a daunting challenge that new special education teachers face.

Collaboration can be particularly challenging when the school lacks strategies and structures necessary to support the inclusion of students with disabilities. Novice special education teachers may feel unwelcome when general education teachers resist their efforts to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms. They may experience stress when they perceive that students with disabilities are not faring well in general education classrooms.

Other factors also may make it difficult for novice special education teachers to collaborate and monitor their students' progress in general education. Examples include:

- **Physical location of teachers.** Classrooms that are separate from general education teachers reduce special education teachers' opportunities to interact with them.
- **Heavy caseloads.** Collaboration can be hampered when special education

teachers have many different students who are assigned to many different general education teachers.

- **Ineffective communication.** Collaboration is hindered by inadequate meeting time and lack of shared professional development opportunities.
- **Inadequate preparation.** Inadequate knowledge and skills about how to collaborate and include students with disabilities in general education classrooms can create difficulties.

Concerns: Interactions with Adults

Novice special education teachers also are expected to build relationships with administrators, paraprofessionals, and family members. In some cases, establishing working relationships can pose challenges. Consider the following examples.

Interactions with Administrators

Administrative support is one of the most significant factors in reducing stress for novice special education teachers. Administrative support can buffer the first year stress. Special education teachers with strong administrative support report greater job satisfaction, higher levels of commitment, more professional development opportunities, greater colleague support, fewer role problems, and lower levels of stress and burnout than do their less supported peers.

Interactions with Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are a source of support for novice special education teachers. However, many new teachers find it challenging to work with them. Novice special education teachers often report inadequate preparation for supervising, managing, and coordinating paraprofessionals. Specific challenges include learn-

ing how to set expectations, determining a structure and schedule for paraprofessionals, dealing with paraprofessionals who interact inappropriately with students, and finding time to work with paraprofessionals. In some cases, tensions may arise when novice teachers must supervise paraprofessionals who are older and more familiar with the school and students than they are.

Interactions with Parents

Interacting with parents can be challenging for novice special education teachers. New teachers may encounter problems such as addressing low parent involvement, being uncomfortable conducting different types of meetings (e.g., Individualized Education Program meetings, referral meetings), and determining an appropriate amount of interaction. Novice special education teachers may benefit from help with planning and conducting parent-family conferences.

Administrative Support to Address Concerns

Administrators can help novice special education teachers address their concerns related to inclusion, collaboration, and interacting with other adults in the following ways:

- Locate special education classrooms in close physical proximity to those of general education teachers.
- Provide time for teacher collaboration.
- Structure and clarify novices' roles and responsibilities relating to students with disabilities throughout the school.
- Assign capable mentors to provide school-based socialization and instructional coaching.

◎◎ Sightings

In addition to collaborating and interacting with adults, novice special education teachers have significant concerns about pedagogy and managing roles. NCIPP has prepared briefs on these topics for administrators. These are available on the NCIPP website (www.ncipp.org):

- *Instructional Challenges: Understanding the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers.*
- *The Challenge of Managing Roles: Understanding the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers.*

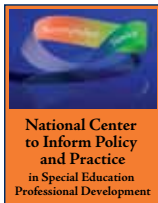


- Provide instructional support. Offer instructional ideas and feedback in nonthreatening ways.
- Provide assistance in supervising and managing paraprofessionals. Help novices schedule the work. Ensure adequate planning time.
- Assist them in planning for family involvement. Help new teachers set realistic expectations for engaging parents. Include suggestions for addressing difficult parent interactions.

Learn More. This Brief summarizes select findings from a comprehensive review of the literature:

Billingsley, B. S., Griffin, C. C., Smith, S. J., Kamman, M., & Israel, M. (2009). *A review of teacher induction in special education: Research, practice, and technology solutions* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-1). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at www.ncipp.org.



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