

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers-Administrators [AII-02]

The Challenge of Managing Roles

Understanding the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers

Briefly...

Understanding the challenges that novice special education teachers encounter in their first years 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 manage their complex and challenging roles.

The learning curve is high for novice special education teachers. They must assume full teaching responsibilities, while at the same time become familiar with district and school policies, curriculum, and assessment policies and procedures. They are expected to build relationships with administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, families, and other service providers. For the most part, novice special education teachers have the same responsibilities as their more experienced counterparts, even though they may lack the knowledge and skills of their more experienced peers.

The range and volume of responsibilities can seem insurmountable to novice special education teachers. In fact, many do not see their workloads as manageable. Challenging work conditions—such as an uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, time pressures, heavy caseloads, scheduling difficulties, paperwork, and routine requirements—can contribute to their decision to leave teaching.

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 managing their complex and challenging roles. It offers some suggestions that administrators might use to help new teachers succeed.

Concerns: Time and Scheduling

Not having adequate time to teach and address the varied needs of students is a pressing concern for novice special education teachers. The task of scheduling, organizing, and managing an environment of adults, along with students with disabilities, across multiple grades and subjects can be overwhelming. The situation can become even more challenging when students change classrooms many times throughout the day or when teachers are assigned to two or more schools.

Having insufficient time during the day to complete paperwork—such as writing Individualized Education Programs, referrals, and evaluations—along with planning for instruction also can be a major concern. Novice special education teachers find that they must complete substantial amounts of work outside of school, during nonschool hours.

Concerns: Caseloads

Heavy caseloads can make it hard for novice special education teachers to attend to the individual needs of their students. This can be particularly challenging if teachers are expected to provide services to students across many classrooms. Caseloads in which students have multiple academic and behavioral needs and require different levels of support also can create challenges for effective instruction, curriculum planning, and behavior management.

Concerns: Legal Requirements, Paperwork, and Meetings

Novice special education teachers can find it difficult to function effectively in the face of excessive and competing responsibilities. Legal requirements and paperwork—such as writing Individualized Education Programs and completing referral, placement, and evaluation documents—can be challenging. The volume of work and the logistics of completing it also can present challenges, particularly when tasks involve notifying parents, scheduling meetings, inviting appropriate people to meetings, creating meeting agendas, and completing forms.

Novice special education teachers expect to spend the majority of their time teaching and express frustration when their instructional pursuits are reduced because of bureaucratic tasks such as meetings and paperwork.

Concerns: Role Confusion and Ambiguity

Novice special education teachers often express confusion about their roles and what is expected of them. For example, they may be unclear about their roles and responsibilities relating to students, especially when working collaboratively with general education teachers. General education teachers also may be unsure about their role with students with disabilities, which can exacerbate role confusion as teachers collaborate. Role overload, ambiguity, and conflict are associated with job dissatisfaction, turnover, and weakened commitment to the teaching profession.

Administrative Support to Address Concerns

Administrators can help novice special education teachers better manage their roles and responsibilities in the following ways:

- Help novices develop time management skills. Work with them to develop schedules and organize their responsibilities.
- Provide sheltered status. Reduce caseloads, assign fewer administrative duties, and provide support for the improvement of their pedagogy.
- Encourage novices not to take on extracurricular assignments (e.g., cheerleading coach).
- Offer assistance with legal tasks and paperwork.
- Define roles and responsibilities. Structure and clarify novices' roles and responsibilities relating to students with disabilities throughout the school. Offer them support in negotiating their roles and coordinating

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In addition to managing roles, novice special education teachers also have significant concerns about pedagogy and collaborating and/or interacting with adults. 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 Challenges of Inclusion and Collaboration: Understanding the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers.*

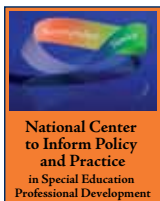


- complex responsibilities for inclusion and collaboration.
- Encourage novices to seek help. New teachers may be reluctant to seek help, especially from administrators and supervisors who have responsibility for evaluating them. Make sure they have opportunities to receive assistance in nonthreatening ways.
- Provide a structured system of support, including school-based socialization and instructional coaching.

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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