

# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers—Administrators [AII-03]

### Principals Make a Difference

#### Recommendations for Strengthening Special Education Teacher Induction

##### *Briefly...*

*Although novice special education teachers benefit from the same types of support and induction that their general education colleagues receive, certain aspects of their experience require additional attention. Find out what principals can do to help novice special education teachers thrive.*

Principals have a significant influence on the well-being of novice teachers. In fact, they can be the decisive factor in a new teacher's commitment to staying in or leaving teaching.

The quality of the relationship with school administrators is as important to novice special education teachers as it is to novice general education teachers. Although special education teachers can benefit from general administrative support, they also may require additional supports that address particular realities they face—such as teaching students across disability groups, in different settings, and often in isolation from their general education colleagues. Principals who understand the stresses faced by novice special education teachers can foster a school culture that better supports them.

Read on to learn how principals are expanding their roles to support novice special education teachers.

##### **Promoting Positive School Culture**

School culture affects novice teachers' satisfaction with their jobs and their determination to stay in teaching. Effective principals make induction an integral part of the school culture. General activities that principals can

use to promote a positive culture for all novice teachers include:

- Engaging them in orientation sessions that are designed to help them understand the school's policies and procedures.
- Observing them and offering nonthreatening feedback of their teaching.
- Protecting them from difficult situations (e.g., large numbers of challenging students, extensive nonteaching duties, etc.).
- Providing mentors who are capable of meeting new teachers' needs.
- Providing time to plan with colleagues, observe other classrooms, and meet with other new teachers for peer support.
- Providing resources (e.g., curriculum materials, professional development, suitable classroom space, etc.).

Novice special education teachers may require additional administrative support to help them address challenges related to their specific roles and responsibilities. For example, negotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes is one of the most daunting challenges that new special education teachers face. Effective administrators can support these teachers by promoting a schoolwide philosophy of joint responsibility for

all students and ensuring that necessary structures (e.g., discussions about inclusion as part of professional learning communities, sufficient time for collaboration among teachers who work with common students, etc.) are in place to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Novice special education teachers also can find it difficult to function effectively in the face of excessive and competing responsibilities. They face a variety of challenging tasks unique to their position, including:

- Completing legal requirements and paperwork (e.g., writing Individualized Education Programs).
- Scheduling, organizing, and managing an environment of adults, along with students with disabilities, across multiple grades and subjects.
- Supervising paraprofessionals.

Effective principals assist novice special education teachers with these tasks and enlist the informal and formal help of other teachers. Principals also exercise caution when assigning teacher caseloads (e.g., not placing novice special education teachers with students whom they are unprepared to teach).

### Serving as an Instructional Leader

Leadership style is the dominant way in which principals promote positive school culture. Principals who are effective with beginning teachers are caring and supportive of them. They have high expectations for teacher and student learning. They create a workplace that respects what new teachers bring to the school and promote collaboration and shared decision making.

The principal's role with novice special education teachers is first and foremost to understand what they do. Informed principals identify veteran special education teachers and district level staff to provide specialized instructional support and supervision.

Principals also play an important role in establishing school-based support that helps socialize novice special education teachers into the school culture. They find ways to engage these teachers with other

teachers in the school (e.g., placing novices on teaching teams with general educators, locating novices' classrooms near general education classrooms, including novices in all facets of school-based decision making, etc.).

### Supporting Induction and Mentoring Programs

The principal often acts as the coordinator of mentors in the school and as a liaison with district-level induction coordinators. Principals monitor the mentor-mentee relationships in their schools and make decisions about matching mentors and mentees.

The principal's role in facilitating and assisting with mentoring can differ substantially when working with a novice special education teacher. For example, off-site personnel may provide mentoring for these novice teachers, especially when there are no other special education teachers in the building. In such cases, principals should ensure that novice special education teachers also have a school-based mentor who provides day-to-day socialization and support for immediate classroom concerns. Novice special education teachers often perceive natural, collegial, and authentic relationships with other teachers in the building as most valuable.

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

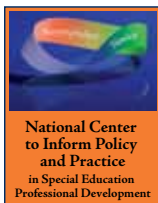
Pugach, M. C., Blanton, L. P., Correa, V. I., McLeskey, J., & Langley, L. K. (2009). *The role of collaboration in supporting the induction and retention of new special education teachers* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-2). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).

### ◎◎ Sightings

Districts can support principals by:

- Understanding that induction is only one of the many responsibilities that compete for principals' time.
- Distributing responsibility for induction and mentoring training across the district and school staff.
- Providing them with professional development in special education.
- Supporting the development of collaborative school cultures (e.g., schedule release time, offer incentives).
- Making available district personnel who have expertise in special education.



This Brief is part of a series designed to help special education teachers during their initial years in the profession. The National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (cooperative agreement # H325Q070002). Bonnie Jones is the OSEP Project Officer. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. NCIPP aims to inform special education policy and practice by examining and recommending those policies and practices that improve the retention and quality of beginning special education teachers. There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please use proper citation. The Briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy and Associates.

© 2010 NCIPP. University of Florida, 360 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611 • (352) 273-4259 • [ncipp@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:ncipp@coe.ufl.edu)

