

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers-Administrators [AII-04]

Instructional Challenges

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 instructional challenges.

Novice special education teachers struggle with many of the same pedagogical challenges as their general education counterparts. They often need help learning the curriculum, acquiring and adapting necessary materials, and addressing challenging student behavior.

A complicating factor is that novice special education teachers typically have curricular responsibilities that span multiple content areas and grade levels. Some novice special education teachers report minimal preparation in the content areas, leaving them to spend much of their time learning content rather than thinking about how to design appropriate teaching strategies and routines to meet individual student needs.

An understanding of novice special education teachers' concerns can help administrators prepare mentors and plan more relevant induction programs. This Brief looks at novice special education teachers' concerns related to instruction. It offers some suggestions that administrators might use to help new teachers succeed.

Concerns: Curriculum, Teaching, and Assessment

Novice special education teachers struggle to carry out their major responsibilities. They must learn content, pre-

pare lessons, and create materials across multiple grade levels while monitoring student performance and coordinating their efforts with general education teachers. They often feel inadequately prepared to meet the complex needs of students across a range of curriculum areas, including academics, social skills, assessment, learning strategies, transition, and technology. In addition, novice special education teachers may have difficulty using alternative instructional delivery formats such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning.

The lack of knowledge about specific content areas is particularly challenging when novice special education teachers have responsibility for multiple subjects. In these situations, new teachers are essentially learning the content as they teach it. This can interfere with their ability to deliver a standards-based curriculum in which curriculum, Individualized Education Program goals, and instruction are matched with grade expectations and student abilities.

Novice special education teachers find teaching reading to be particularly challenging, especially for students with complex reading problems. They may have difficulty diagnosing reading problems, assessing student reading level, and learning the reading content taught in specific grades.

Concerns: Availability of Adequate Materials

Novice special education teachers often report having insufficient and inadequate teaching materials. Variations of this problem include:

- Outdated materials and technology.
- Inadequate numbers of books.
- No teacher manuals.
- Few consumables.
- Insufficient alternative materials to address the range of their students' instructional levels.

Novice special education teachers also may need training in how to use assistive technology and other devices that are available.

Novice special education teachers without background knowledge in content areas and who are lacking materials often have additional challenges. These new teachers may be left on their own to develop instructional materials based on what is available to them. This can result in stress and can cut into time needed for other responsibilities. It also can be time consuming when novice teachers secure materials on their own (e.g., searching for materials on the Internet, asking university faculty for suggestions, requesting materials from publishers).

Concerns: Student Behavior

Novice special education and general education teachers all typically struggle with addressing challenging student behavior. They have difficulty controlling student behavior that interferes with teaching.

However, novice special education teachers often are faced with more severe problems that may require individualized behavioral plans. For example, they describe difficulty trying to teach while dealing with student behaviors such as refusing to work, challenging their authority, and becoming verbally and/or physically aggressive. In most cases, these novice teachers have not received preparation for dealing with these kinds of complex and troubling behaviors.

Administrative Support to Address Concerns

Administrators can help novice special education teachers with instructional challenges in the following ways:

- Provide opportunities for novices to develop curriculum knowledge by observing veteran teachers, attending professional development sessions, and sharing resources with colleagues.
- Make sure that reading materials are structured and adequate for teaching students with disabilities. Provide new teachers with professional development in using the materials.
- Reduce the number of content areas in which novices are assigned to teach.
- Ensure that novices have necessary instructional resources and materials.
- Support positive student behavior by establishing explicit norms for respect and equity, enforcing schoolwide expectations about behavior, and engaging parents in the goals and life of schools.
- Teach novices strategies for dealing with challenging behavior (e.g., how to avoid power struggles, respond-

◎◎ Sightings

In addition to instructional concerns, novice special education teachers also have significant concerns about managing roles 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):

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

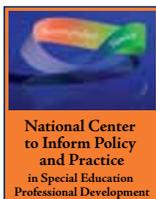


ing to behavioral triggers) as well as classroom management strategies that provide positive behavioral support (e.g., promoting a supportive learning community, giving students ownership and choice in the learning process).

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.



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.

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