

# Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers-Administrators [AII-11]

## How Administrators Can Help Novice Special Education Teachers Thrive

Induction Practices That Make a Difference

### *Briefly...*

*Increasingly, principals play an important role in new special education teacher induction. 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. This Brief summarizes what principals can do—including promising practices—to help novice special education teachers thrive.*

Novice teacher induction begins when a preservice teacher enters the workforce, and it may extend throughout the next several years of teaching. Induction represents a phase in development that focuses on new teachers' concerns and problems of practice. It also serves as a catalyst for new teacher socialization in the school. In many locales, formal induction programs help new teachers become acclimated to the school context and develop professionally.

Mentoring is at the heart of both formal and informal induction support. Mentoring and induction influence novice special education teachers' determination to remain in teaching. Those who experience high levels of induction support tend to report greater job satisfaction and success in teaching challenging students.

Principal support strongly influences new teachers' job satisfaction and their decision to remain in teaching. The principal's role in facilitating and assisting with mentoring and induction can differ substantially when working with novice special education teachers. For example, off-site personnel may provide mentoring for novice special education

teachers, especially when there are no other special education teachers in the building. In such cases, principals should ensure that these novice teachers also have a school-based mentor who provides day-to-day socialization and support for instruction and classroom management.

Although novice special education teachers can benefit from general administrative induction support, they also may require additional supports that address the unique obstacles they face—such as teaching students across disability groups, and in different settings, often in isolation from their general education colleagues. Principals who understand the stresses faced by these novice teachers can foster a school culture and support system that helps them succeed. Read on to learn more about what principals can do to ensure that novice special education teachers succeed.

### **Help Novice Special Education Teachers Manage Multiple Roles**

The range and volume of responsibilities can seem insurmountable to novice

## Consider This...

Novice special education teachers benefit from working collaboratively with general education colleagues—e.g., co-teaching and team teaching, and in professional learning communities—in which they support one another in providing a high-quality education to all students. When novice special education teachers collaborate with their general education colleagues, they:

- Are not left to their own devices to learn to teach.
- Are more likely to view general educators as sources of support.
- Are less likely to rely solely on special education teachers.
- Appreciate the opportunity to gain knowledge about the general education curriculum, which may widen their base of support and contribute to their socialization as members of the school community.



special education teachers. Challenging work conditions—such as an uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, time pressures, scheduling difficulties, burdensome paperwork, and routine requirements—can contribute to their decision to leave teaching.

An understanding of novice special education teachers' concerns related to managing their roles can help administrators prepare mentors and plan more relevant induction programs. Areas of particular concern include the following:

- **Time and scheduling.** Not having adequate time to teach and address the varied needs of students is a pressing concern for novice teachers. They can be overwhelmed by the need to schedule, organize, and manage an environment of adults (e.g., paraprofessionals) and students with disabilities, across multiple grades and subjects. 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 tasks—such as writing Individualized Education Programs—is also a major concern.

- **Caseload.** Heavy and/or challenging caseloads can make it hard for novice teachers to attend to students' individual needs. This can be particularly difficult if they are expected to provide services to students across many classrooms.
- **Required paperwork and meetings.** Novice special education teachers are faced with excessive and competing responsibilities. Required paperwork—such as completing referral, placement, and evaluation documents—can be challenging. The volume of work and the logistics of completing it also can present challenges.
- **Role confusion/ambiguity.** Role overload, ambiguity, and conflict are associated with novice special education teachers' job dissatisfaction, and turnover. These teachers often express confusion about their roles and what is expected of them, especially when working in collaborative positions.

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

- Help them 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 them not to take on extra-curricular assignments.
- Offer assistance with required tasks and paperwork.
- Define roles and responsibilities.
- Offer them support in negotiating their roles and coordinating complex responsibilities for inclusion and collaboration.
- Provide them with constructive avenues through which to seek help and to receive assistance.

## Provide Induction Support Tailored to Novice Special Education Teachers' Needs

Administrators who understand the demands placed on novice special education teachers are in a better position to provide relevant induction experiences for them. An understanding of the following key program components may be helpful as administrators revise programs and guide the work of mentors.

### Sightings

#### E-mentoring

**E-mentoring**—the use of technology-based communication formats in which mentors and mentees interact—is a promising approach for supporting novice teachers. E-mentoring is not a substitute for school-based mentors who provide socialization support. Rather, e-mentoring offers a solution to the challenge of finding suitable building-based mentors who can provide instructional coaching in the new teacher's specialization area.



- **Select mentors carefully.** Mentors who provide instructional coaching should be matched carefully with mentees. Novice special education teachers prefer mentors who teach students with similar disabilities and who teach in the same grade level. When paired with like teachers, novice special education teachers tend to request assistance often and rate assistance favorably. In cases where special education mentors are not available in the novice’s school, two mentors may be necessary—one mentor who helps to socialize the new teacher in the building and another whose responsibility is instructional coaching.
- **Encourage all staff members to participate in induction programs.** Novice special education teachers should develop relationships with their professional colleagues, including other special education teachers, related service providers, and paraprofessionals. General education teachers often provide ongoing advice about supplies, schedules, routines, unwritten school rules, and effective teaching strategies. Once mentoring ends, these individuals may provide more substantial support than do formal mentors.

- **Provide formal and informal sources of support.** Formally scheduled meetings with mentors appeal to novice special education teachers. Such meetings help to facilitate collaboration and communication between mentors and mentees. Novice teachers also perceive informal supports—such as unscheduled meetings with mentors and colleagues, unannounced classroom visits, and hand-written notes—to be helpful. Principals should ensure that teachers have release time for routinely scheduled meetings and other professional development activities. They also can make sure that professional development is focused on special education issues.
- **Ensure frequency and proximity of support.** Novice special education teachers who have contact with their mentor at least once a week for the first year tend to rate mentoring as effective. However, these teachers also perceive this amount of assistance to be inadequate for addressing all of their professional and emotional needs. They also tend to access colleagues who are in close proximity for assistance.
- **Match the content of support to novice teacher needs.** Novice special education teachers find professional development most effective when the content addresses special education issues (e.g., strategies to teach and motivate challenging students, adapting functional materials for instruction, information pertaining to special education paperwork and procedures, etc. ), rather than generic new teacher content.
- **Consider the role of evaluation.** While new teachers benefit from constructive criticism and feedback from mentors, they prefer mentors to share information as guides or advisors, and not as supervisors. Novice teachers also feel uncomfortable working with mentors who have roles that require them to make decisions about the new teacher’s certification and re-employment.

## Establish a Positive School Climate

The school context sets the tone for the early career experiences of novice special education teachers. One of the challenges these teachers face is feeling that they are an integral part of the school culture. A positive school climate is associated with beginning teachers’ job satisfaction and their intention to remain in teaching. 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 constructive feedback.
- Protecting them from difficult situations (e.g., large numbers of challenging students, extensive nonteaching duties, etc.).
- Providing mentors who are capable of meeting new teacher needs.
- Providing time to plan with colleagues, observe other classrooms,

### ○○ *Sightings*

Preservice special education teachers who participate in Professional Development Schools—especially those who have had capable mentors and concrete field experiences and coursework—report feeling well prepared. Participating students also appear to maintain or make greater gains in achievement, have a higher degree of motivation, and have better attendance records. Partnership schools and districts also tend to hire these preservice teachers upon graduation.



### ○○ *Sightings*

The number of individuals seeking special education certification through alternative routes is increasing nationwide. Partnerships between higher education teacher educators and school faculty can enhance the efficacy of alternative route certification (ARC) programs. ARC candidates who participate in programs characterized by strong partnerships tend to remain in special education positions in greater number than do those candidates who participate in stand-alone district-sponsored programs.



and meet with other new teachers for peer support.

- Providing resources (e.g., curriculum materials, professional development, and suitable classroom space).

Novice special education teachers may require additional administrative support to help them address challenges related to their specific roles and responsibilities. For example, facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes can be a daunting challenge. Effective administrators can support novice 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.

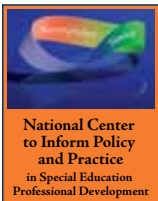
Novice special education teachers report high satisfaction when they collaborate with veteran teachers. Principals play an essential role in determining how the human resources within a school building are dispersed, including how veteran general education teachers interact with these teachers. They find ways to engage novice special education 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.).

**Learn More.** This Brief summarizes select findings from several comprehensive reviews of the literature conducted by

the National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP):

- 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.
- Hirsch, E., Rorrer, A., Sindelar, P. T., Dawson, S. A., Heretick, J., & Jia, C. L. (2009). *State policies to improve the mentoring of beginning special education teachers*. (NCIPP Doc. No. PA-1). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.
- 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.
- Rosenberg, M. S., Brownell, M., McCray, E. D., deBettencourt, L. U., Leko, M., & Long, S. (2009). *Development and sustainability of school-university partnerships in special education teacher preparation: A critical review of the literature*. (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-3). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

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



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