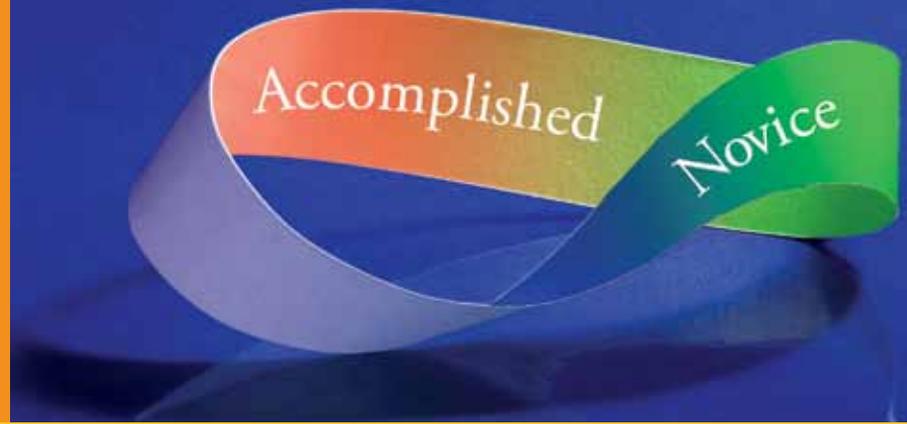


# Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers—Administrators [AII-12]

## Challenges in Special Education Teacher Induction—Why a Model is Needed for These Novices

### *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 attention.*

*This Brief summarizes why a mentoring model is needed for special novice education teachers and what administrators can do to help these 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. 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. Mentors provide two types of support:

- **Instructional coaching.** Mentors observe the beginning teacher and offer constructive feedback. They make suggestions on how to improve practice.
- **Socialization.** Mentors help the beginning teacher become acclimated to the school and district. They help new teachers understand policies and procedures.

Strong mentoring programs influence novice special education teachers' determination to remain in teaching. Those who experience high levels of support tend to report greater job satisfaction

and success in teaching challenging students.

However, aspects of novice special education teachers' experience may necessitate a different approach to standard mentoring programs. Principals and school district administrators who understand these differences are in a position to tailor mentoring practices to the needs of these novices. Read on to learn more about an emerging mentoring model for novice special education teachers.

### Challenges in Special Education Teacher Induction

Novice special education teachers face challenges such as teaching students whose needs vary greatly and across various service delivery models, often in isolation from their general education colleagues. Work conditions specific to special education—such as an uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, time pressures, scheduling difficulties, heavy caseloads, paperwork, and bureaucratic requirements—also can pose challenges.

Given this specialized context, it is not surprising that novice special education teachers prefer mentors who teach

students who have similar characteristics and who are close in age to their own students. Well-matched mentors can provide new teachers with instructional support and professional development that is relevant to their needs. However, in many schools such a mentor may not be available.

## An Emerging Mentoring Model for Special Education Teachers

When a school does not have a mentor who can serve as an instructional coach—a veteran proficient in mentoring skills who teaches students who are similar to those of the mentee—what can be done to ensure that the novice special education teacher receives the help he or she needs to thrive? The situation may be remedied by providing two mentors with differentiated roles.

The novice teacher is assigned a school-based mentor—who may be a general education teacher—who provides day-to-day socialization and support for immediate classroom concerns. These school-based mentors help the novice learn the school and district policies and procedures. Because novice teachers tend to interact and seek more support from their colleagues who are in close proximity to them, principals should locate novice special education teachers' classrooms near their mentor, as well as near general education teachers in general. They also should make sure that novices have adequate release time to meet with their mentors.

The novice teacher also is assigned an instructional coach who has expertise in the mentee's area of specialization. Typi-

cally, districts have approached providing an off-site mentor in the following ways:

- **Assign a mentor from a nearby school.** In such cases, administrators should ensure adequate supports, such as release time to meet, flexible scheduling, etc. These mentors often are compensated (e.g., reduced instructional duties, stipends, etc.).
- **Develop a centralized cadre of mentors.** In such cases, the district assigns mentors from a group of trained mentors, who often serve in this role full-time.

### E-Mentoring—A Promising Practice

E-mentoring—the use of technology-based communication formats in which mentors and mentees interact—is emerging as a solution for supporting novice teachers, especially when they have limited access to in-building support. Examples of e-mentoring attributes that may be attractive to special education mentor programs follow.

- **Mentor selection.** Mentors are not limited by school assignment, but instead can be selected based on their expertise and matched to the novice teacher's needs.
- **Scheduling time.** Unlike traditional programs, e-mentoring is not limited to a specific time period. The duration of the exchange is dependent upon the needs of the novice teacher.
- **Engagement flexibility.** By not requiring face-to-face engagement, teachers and mentors have flexibility in when they post questions, answers, or general comments. E-mails and discussion board entries can be archived for greater flexibility of use. In addition, the accessible nature of e-mail and discussion forum postings allows for

## ◎◎ Sightings

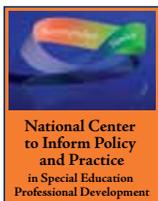
The majority of district mentoring policies do not differentiate between novice special education teachers and their general education counterparts. Although novice special education teachers may benefit in part from general induction practices, their experience is limited when there is little or no attention given to their instructional needs.



easy access at home, at school, and anywhere by cell phone.

- **Peer and mentor support: Online communities can provide peer support that is lacking for many beginning teachers.** Access to peers who have similar issues, challenges, and classrooms helps novice teachers address feelings of isolation.
- **Easy monitoring.** E-mail and discussion forum postings require individuals to sign in. This produces a permanent record that may simplify program evaluation.

**Learn More.** This Brief summarizes select findings from four comprehensive reviews of the literature conducted the by National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP). These reviews and other *Induction Insight* briefs are available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).



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