

# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers–Family [FII-1]

### Your Child Has a First-Year Teacher—How Will the School Provide Support?

#### *Briefly...*

*Many school districts provide induction support for beginning teachers—including special education teachers—to help them hone their instructional skills and become a part of the school culture.*

*Learn more about the types of support that help beginning special education teachers thrive.*

Beginning special education teachers have the same responsibilities as their more experienced counterparts. However, as these new teachers assume full teaching responsibilities they also must become familiar with district and school policies, curriculum, and assessment procedures. At the same time they are expected to build relationships with children and families as well as administrators, other teachers, paraprofessionals, and service providers.

Today, many school districts provide induction support for beginning teachers that begins when a preservice teacher enters the workforce, and possibly extends throughout the next several years of teaching. Induction represents a phase in professional development that focuses on new teachers' concerns and problems of practice. It also serves as a catalyst to help new teachers become integrated in the school.

Induction support often includes:

- An experienced mentor assigned to help the beginning teacher.
- Opportunities to collaborate and talk with other experienced teachers.
- Help from the principal.

Beginning teachers who experience high levels of induction support tend to report greater job satisfaction and

success in teaching students with challenging needs. If your child has a teacher who is new to teaching, talk with the school principal about the kinds of induction support available for him or her. Read on for specific questions to ask.

#### **Question: Who Will Be Assigned as the Beginning Teacher's Mentor?**

Mentoring is at the heart of both formal and informal induction support. Mentors may provide two types of support:

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

Beginning 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 there may not be a mentor available to meet the new teacher's specialized needs. In such cases, off-site personnel may provide mentoring for novice special education teachers, especially when there are no other special education teachers in the building. If an external mentor is assigned, principals should ensure that the beginning teacher also has a school-based mentor who provides day-to-day support for immediate classroom concerns.

### Question: What Types of Opportunities Will the Teacher Have to Collaborate with Experienced Peers?

Beginning 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 new teachers. They find ways to engage them with other teachers in the school (e.g., placing new teachers on teaching teams with general educators, locating new teachers' classrooms near general education classrooms, including new teachers in all facets of school-based decision making, etc.).

Beginning special education teachers also benefit in other ways from working collaboratively with general education colleagues (e.g., co-teaching and team teaching, and in Professional Learning Communities) in ways in which they can 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 more likely to view general educators as sources of support. General education teachers often provide ongoing advice about supplies, schedules, routines, unwritten school rules, and effective teaching strategies.
- Appreciate the opportunity to gain knowledge about the general education curriculum, which may widen their base of support and contribute to their becoming members of the school community.

### Question: What Kinds of Administrative Support Will Be Available to the Beginning Teacher?

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 beginning special education teachers. Find out if these teachers will receive relevant support that helps them address the unique obstacles they face (e.g., such as teaching students across disability groups and in different settings, often in isolation from their general education colleagues). Examples follow.

- **Time and scheduling.** Beginning teachers may benefit from time management support to help them address the varied needs of students, collaborate with colleagues (e.g., supervise paraprofessionals, coordinate inclusion activities, etc.), and complete paperwork tasks.
- **Caseload.** Beginning teachers may benefit from a reduced caseload. Heavy and/or challenging caseloads can make it hard for novice teachers to attend to students' individual needs, especially if they are expected

### Consider This...

Many states and districts have formal induction policies that guide the development of local induction programs. Policy elements that promote high-quality mentoring practice include:

- Which teachers are served.
- Mentor selection and training.
- Mentor matching and assignment.
- Delivery, including amount of contact time new teachers have with mentors.
- Accountability.
- Funding resources.

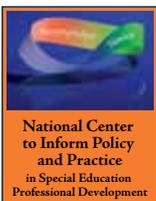
Find out if your state has an induction policy. Ask to see a copy of the district induction policy. Check to see if your child's teachers are receiving the supports and resources to which they are entitled.



to provide services to students across many classrooms.

- **Required paperwork and meetings.** Beginning teachers may benefit from administrative support with required paperwork—such as completing referral, placement, and evaluation documents.

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