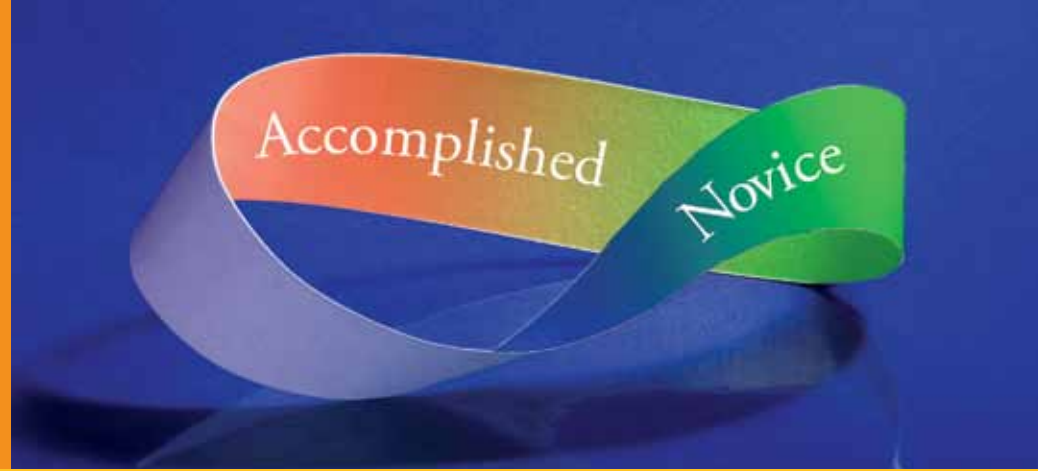


Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers—Policymakers [PII-1]

New Roles for Principals in Supporting Novice Special Education Teachers

Briefly...

Understanding how principals' roles are expanding to address the needs of novice special education teachers provides important information for policymakers as they set policies and support districts. Learn more about how particular aspects of these new teachers' experiences can require additional administrative attention.

Having a quality relationship with school administrators is important to novice teachers. Principal support influences teachers' job satisfaction and decisions to remain in teaching.

Although special education teachers can benefit from general administrative support, they also may require additional supports that address the unique obstacles they face—such as teaching students across disability groups, in different settings, and often in isolation from their general education colleagues. Principals who understand these stresses can foster a school culture that better supports their induction.

What can policymakers do to support principals in assuming increased responsibility for special education teacher induction? The first step is to understand the pressures faced by novice special education teachers and the various ways that principals can extend support. This knowledge can help inform future induction policies, professional development opportunities through principal accreditation programs and their ongoing professional development activities, and resources provided to school districts.

This Brief looks at how principals are expanding their roles to address the

realities faced by novice special education teachers. Information is organized around common ways that principals provide support to novice teachers.

Expanding the Principal's Role in 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 non-threatening feedback.
- Protecting them from difficult situations (e.g., large numbers of challenging students and 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 specific roles and responsibilities. For example, negotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes can be a daunting challenge that new special education teachers face. 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

◎◎ Sightings

Policymakers can support principals by:

- Understanding the challenges they face in supporting novice teachers.
- Considering policies that distribute responsibility for induction and mentoring training across the district and school staff.
- Providing them with professional development and technical assistance in special education.
- Encouraging administrator preparation programs to include information on novice special education induction.



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 or not licensed to teach).

Expanding the Principal's Role as Instructional Leader

Principals who are effective with beginning teachers are caring and supportive of new teachers. 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 for 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.).

Expanding the Principal's Role in Supporting Mentoring Programs

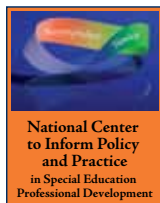
The principal often acts as the coordinator of mentors in the school and as a liaison with district-level induction coordinators. Principals monitor the mentor-mentee relationships in their schools and may sometimes make decisions about matching mentors and mentees.

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 novice special education 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 support for immediate classroom concerns.

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.



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