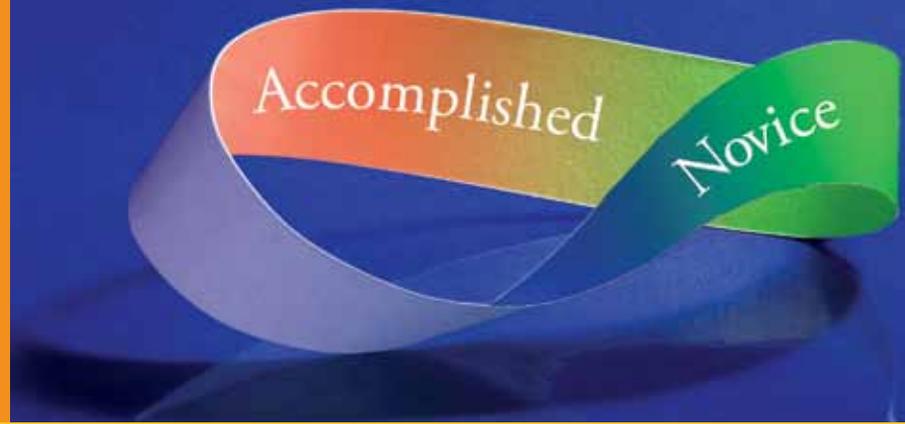


Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers—Policymakers [PII-6]

Ensuring Strong Induction Policies and Support

Briefly...

Shortages of fully qualified special education teachers have led policymakers to promote policies and support programs that increase the supply of new teachers and that help to ensure their retention. To promote retention, policymakers have emphasized beginning teacher induction and mentoring—the focus of this Brief.

Strong induction programs 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.

Although novice special education teachers can benefit from standard induction support, they also may require additional supports that address the realities they face—such as teaching students across disability groups, and in different settings, often in isolation from their general education colleagues. The range and volume of responsibilities can seem insurmountable to novice 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 early in their careers.

Policymakers who understand the particular stresses faced by novice special education teachers can provide policies and programmatic support matched to their needs. Read on to learn more about what policymakers can do to ensure novice special education teachers succeed.

Does Your State Induction Policy Recognize the Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers?

State policies help to promote high-quality mentoring by shaping the design and delivery and identifying the resources to support novice teachers and their mentors. Special education presents a particular challenge for policy implementation. For example, some schools have only one special education teacher. Attention to the following policy elements may be helpful in enhancing induction for these novices.

- **Eligibility and duration of support.** State policymakers should consider not just the duration, but also the type of mentoring support novice teachers need and how it may change over time.
- **Mentor selection.** Mentors should be chosen on the basis of a rigorous selection process conducted by school leaders who know the characteristics of high-quality special education mentors and the kinds of mentors needed for particular schools and specialized contexts.
- **Mentor training.** Even for individuals with high mentor potential, training often is needed to help develop appropriate skills and knowledge relevant to novice special education teachers' needs.

- **Mentor matching and assignment.** Teacher retention may improve when novice teachers are matched with mentors from the same field. Policymakers should recognize and accommodate the various contexts in which special educators work. 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 new teachers at the building level, and another whose responsibility is instructional coaching.
- **Delivery.** State policy can be designed to ensure that program standards are specific about meeting the needs of novice special education teachers.
- **Accountability.** Policymakers may want to consider holding districts accountable for demonstrating that novice special educators are being served appropriately.
- **Funding resources.** Policymakers should ensure that adequate financial support and resources are available to support effective implementation,

especially if novice special education teachers require additional support due to the nature of their work.

How Does Your State Support District Induction Programs?

Placing special education teachers in formal mentoring programs designed primarily for general education teachers with little emphasis on their specific needs may have negative effects. Policymakers who understand the demands placed on novice special education teachers are in a better position to provide relevant induction support to districts. Examples include:

- **Characteristics of mentors.** Novice special education teachers prefer mentors who teach students with similar disabilities and who teach at the same grade level.
- **Other providers of support.** General education teachers often provide ongoing socialization support. When formal mentoring ends, these individuals may provide substantial support.
- **Formal and informal sources of support.** Formally scheduled meetings with mentors help to facilitate collaboration and communication. Novice teachers also benefit from informal exchanges (e.g., unscheduled visits).
- **Frequency 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 their needs.
- **Proximity of support.** Novice teachers tend to access colleagues who are in close proximity for assistance more than their assigned mentor—especially if the mentor is not in the same building. However, they prefer men-

tors who are special educators over those who are in the same school.

- **Content of support.** Novice special education teachers find professional development most effective when the content addresses their special education classroom assignments rather than generic new teacher content.
- **Evaluation.** Novice special education teachers may feel more comfortable interacting with mentors who do not have evaluative roles.

Does Your State Support Partnerships?

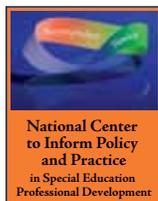
Special education preservice teachers—especially those in alternative route certification programs—benefit from participating in programs where there are strong partnerships between school district and university faculty. Partnerships enable organizations to leverage their resources and enhance their capabilities. Policymakers may consider providing various types of support, including:

- Funding for program start-up and maintenance.
- Resources for mentors (e.g., training, financial incentives, etc.) and teacher candidates (e.g., tuition, etc.).
- Development and maintenance of an infrastructure for distance education strategies.
- Resources for school-based research in which university faculty and school personnel collaborate.
- Encouragement of different types of teacher education arrangements (e.g., dual certification programs in elementary and special education).

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 *Insight* briefs are available on the NCIPP website at www.ncipp.org.

◎◎ Sightings

E-mentoring—the use of technology-based communication formats in which mentors and mentees interact—is a promising approach for supporting novice teachers, especially when they have limited access to in-building support. Because e-mentoring will affect various program elements (e.g., mentor selection, program delivery, etc.) policymakers may want to consider adding it to their mentoring policy.



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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