

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers–Teacher Educators [TEII-2]

The Principal’s Role in Supporting Novice Special Education Teachers

Briefly...

Administrative support that addresses the realities faced by novice special education teachers strongly influences teachers’ satisfaction with their jobs and their determination to remain in teaching. This Brief provides insights for leadership preparation programs, by describing how the principal’s role can be expanded to help novice special education teachers thrive.

Principals play an important role in new teacher induction. The quality of the relationship with school administrators is as important to novice special education teachers as it is to novice general education teachers. Although special education teachers can benefit from general administrative support, they also may require additional supports that address the specific 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 the stresses faced by novice special education teachers can foster a school culture that better supports their induction.

This Brief looks at the areas in which induction preparation for principals—through principal accreditation programs and ongoing professional development activities—might be expanded to address the realities faced by novice special education teachers. Information is organized around the most 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 about their teaching.
- Protecting them from difficult situations (e.g., large numbers of challenging students, 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 challenges related to their specific roles and responsibilities. For example, negotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes is one of the most daunting challenges that new special education teachers face. Effective

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 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 positions, 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 unlicensed 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 with 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 Induction and 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 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 these novice 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 socialization and support for immediate classroom concerns. Novice special education teachers often perceive

◎◎ Sightings

Following are areas of further research and study that may lead to better induction support for novice special education teachers.

- How novice special education teachers are supervised and directed across school contexts, models of service delivery, and disability categories.
- Specific leadership roles and practices of principals who most effectively promote beginning teacher retention.
- How principals establish a school culture that supports novice special education teachers.
- Ways to intervene and assist administrators in the induction process through professional development activities.

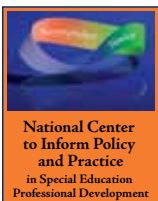


natural, collegial, and authentic relationships with other teachers in the building as most valuable.

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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