

# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers–Teacher Educators [TEII-7]

### A Model to Address the Challenges in Special Education Teacher Induction

#### *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 novice special education teachers and what teacher educators can do to help establish a research base that supports it.*

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 students with challenging needs.

However, aspects of novice special education teachers' experience may necessitate a different approach to standard mentoring programs. Special education teacher educators are in a unique position to help school districts understand and embrace mentoring practices that better address 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

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 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.

The novice teacher also is assigned an instructional coach who has expertise in the mentee's area of specialization. Typically, 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. Aspects of e-mentoring may be especially suited for use in special education mentor programs. These are:

- **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 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.

E-mentoring offers an opportunity for teacher educators to partner with school districts. It also presents an opportunity for teacher educators to engage in research to determine the potential of e-mentoring with novice special education teachers. Examples of possible research areas include:

- Determining the efficacy of e-mentoring as a support.

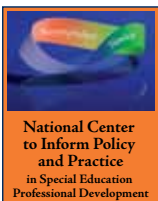
### 👁️👁️ Sightings

Novice special education teachers prefer mentors who are special educators; however, novices also benefit from other professionals in the building who provide socialization and other support. A clear understanding of which professionals, under what circumstances, might best assist novice special education teachers is needed.



- Understanding the impact of technology-based tools on the e-mentoring process.
- Investigating the influence of peer interaction via the e-mentoring process.
- Studying whether e-mentoring affects the questions asked, the issues discussed, the amount of communication that takes place, etc.

**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 *Insight* briefs are available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).



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