

Growing and Improving the Special Education Teacher Workforce

A Focus on Beginning Teachers Can Help

IN THIS WATCH

Chronic shortages make focusing on special education teacher quality difficult but not impossible—What should administrators and policy makers know to meet the challenge?

Is a shortage of special education teachers posing a problem in your district or state? If so, you are not alone. Nationwide, shortages are reported in 98 percent of all school districts—with the greatest demand reported in the poorest schools. At the same time, demand is increasing. An estimated 135,000 more special education teachers than there were in 1998 will be needed by 2008.

Chronic attrition is a major barrier to supplying qualified special education teachers. Research suggests that teachers are most vulnerable to attrition during their first five years of teaching. In addition, the number of new teachers who enter the special education workforce every year is not sufficient to meet the demand.

How can school district administrators and state policy makers balance competing demands for more teachers and improved quality? Read on to gain insights from the research.

Combating Teacher Attrition: Have You Considered Focusing on Beginning Teachers?

Beginning teacher vulnerability is evident in a number of areas that are critical to

success. For example, beginning teachers typically report:

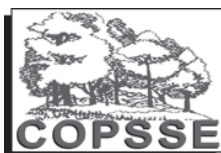
- Struggling with the demands of teaching.
- Experiencing greater isolation from colleagues.
- Being significantly affected by poor school climate and ambiguous expectations.
- Receiving insufficient curricular and technical resources.
- Lacking opportunities for professional growth.

Administrators and policy makers may consider beginning teacher induction programs to help beginning special education teachers succeed and increase their intentions to remain in special education.

Effective beginning teacher induction programs recognize that successful transition from teacher preparation to the classroom requires both a positive work climate and sustained opportunities for learning. Key features of quality induction programs include:

- Clear goals and purposes.

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- A focus on instructional content, pedagogical content, and psychological support.
- Opportunities for interaction between new and experienced teachers.
- Less emphasis on evaluation, with opportunities for summative and formative feedback.
- Ongoing professional development opportunities.

WATCH THIS...

Quality counts. Not only do graduates of intensive alternative route certification programs demonstrate more effective teaching practices than their counterparts in short-cut alternative programs, they also have higher retention rates.

Mentoring is one of the most significant elements in beginning special education teacher induction programs. Mentors should have pedagogical and regulatory knowledge of special education, and be matched to beginning special education teachers on the basis of similarities in the following areas:

- Grade level and content area taught.
- Disability categories taught.
- Teaching model and style.

Did You Know That Some States and Districts Offer Formal Induction Programs?

How does your district and/or state induct new special education teachers? Following are several programs that show promise.

STATEWIDE: CONNECTICUT'S BEST PROGRAM

Connecticut offers new teachers the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST), a compre-

hensive teacher support program. The program boasts an initial pass rate of 85-92 percent. Components of the BEST program include:

- **Mentoring.** Participants engage in regular meetings with mentors. In addition to providing support, mentors conduct classroom observations.
- **Portfolio assessment.** Beginning teachers prepare highly structured portfolios that contain lesson plans, reflective journals, videos of classroom teaching, commentaries, and examples of student work.
- **Professional development.** In addition to mentor support, beginning teachers participate in a content-specific seminar.

STATEWIDE: CALIFORNIA'S BTSA PROGRAM

Fully certified new teachers are eligible to participate in the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA). A remarkable 96 percent retention rate has been observed for first year teachers who complete the program. Components of the BTSA program include:

- Daily on-site support from a trained mentor.
- Monthly formative assessments.
- Individual induction plans.

LOCAL: SANTA CRUZ NEW TEACHER PROJECT


The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project is a collaboration between the University of California-Santa Cruz and surrounding school districts. The program has established an impressive 88 percent retention rate for beginning teachers. Com-

ponents of the project include:

- **Mentors.** Exemplary teachers are given release time to work with novices. Working in a non-evaluative role, they provide comprehensive support, including weekly meetings and classroom assistance.
- **Formative assessment.** Assessment is implemented using formative tools such as logs, analysis of student work, community resource guides, class profiles, individual learning plans, etc.

For More Information


Information reported in this brief was based on syntheses that COPSSE researchers—**Mary T. Brownell, Paul T. Sindelar, Anne G. Bishop, Lisa K. Langley, Seonjin Seo, Michael S. Rosenberg, and Larry Bishop**—crafted into professional presentations (available on the COPSSE web site at www.copsse.org).



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