

# **New Teacher Induction in Special Education**

Prepared for the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

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COPSSE research is focused on the preparation of special education professionals and its impact on beginning teacher quality and student outcomes. Our research is intended to inform scholars and policymakers about advantages and disadvantages of preparation alternatives and the effective use of public funds in addressing personnel shortages.

In addition to our authors and reviewers, many individuals and organizations have contributed substantially to our efforts, including Drs. Erling Boe of the University of Pennsylvania and Elaine Carlson of WESTAT. We also have benefited greatly from collaboration with the National Clearinghouse for the Professions in Special Education, the Policymakers Partnership, and their parent organizations, the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Unlike new professionals in engineering, medicine, and law in the U. S. and new teachers in other countries, beginning U. S. teachers are often assigned to the most challenging classrooms and expected to perform like more experienced teachers. Often facing that challenging classroom without assistance from a more experienced practitioner, teachers often cite a lack of professional support as the primary reason why they leave the field.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper examines general education literature reviews for the past decade and the special education literature related to: (a) the school and classroom conditions under which new special education teachers must perform and (b) induction for special education teachers.

## CRITICAL CONCERNS

Four critical concerns in special education focused the paper on *teacher induction*: (1) the high attrition rate in special education, (2) the potential for inadequate services to children and youth with disabilities by beginning teachers who struggle in adverse situations, (3) the current reliance on alternative routes to certification in many school districts, and (4) the unique conditions within which special educators work.

### Attrition

Special education teachers, in particular, leave the profession at a high rate due to role conflict, lack of collegiality, and poor school climate, among other factors. This directly impacts the quality of education provided students with disabilities by limiting the expertise that develops with experience.

### Inadequate Services

According to statistics from a recent Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) report, the U. S. needs over 200,000 new special educators by 2005, and 4 out of 10 special educators entering the field leave before their fifth year of teaching.

### Alternative Routes to Certification

While there is a growing reliance on alternative routes to certification driven by the nationwide need for teachers, there is continued controversy regarding the success of alternative route certification (ARC) programs and concerns about the limited research on their effectiveness.

### Working Conditions

The conditions under which special education teachers work can be stressful for beginning teachers and often include: role ambiguity, students posing complex behavioral and academic challenges, large case loads, insufficient curricular and technical resources, inadequate administrative support, inadequate time for planning, few opportunities for collaboration and professional development, and excessive procedural demands.

## TEACHER INDUCTION IN GENERAL EDUCATION

### Definitions of Induction

Among multiple definitions of *induction* offered in the literature, induction typically means: (a) a phase in teacher development that occurs during the first year of teaching and focuses on novices' concerns and problems of practice; (b) a time of movement from teacher preparation to practicing teacher that emphasizes the people and the place where the new teacher is inducted, a meaning that is steeped in the socialization literature; or (c) a formal program.

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## Features of Effective Induction Programs

Research suggests that induction programs can: (a) improve instructional effectiveness and promote a sense of satisfaction in novices, (b) fulfill state mandates to provide induction experiences in school districts and to certify teachers, (c) provide a way to share the culture of the school setting and district with beginning teachers, and (d) increase short-term retention rates. Eight factors associated with effective induction programs were identified.

***Supportive school culture and collective responsibility.*** A common characteristic of successful induction programs studied is a school culture of shared responsibility and support. Veteran teachers support inexperienced teachers, have high professional standards, and invest personal time to reach and maintain these standards. The school, including the principal and other personnel, conveys clear messages about what it means to be a high-quality professional, and all must strive to achieve these clearly stated goals. With a school-wide focus on and commitment to new teacher support, novices are better able to develop stronger professional identities and ultimately classroom practices.

***Opportunities for interactions between new and experienced teachers.*** Creating regular opportunities for interaction between new and experienced teachers is also a common feature of strong induction programs, including formal and informal exchanges, classroom observations, spontaneous advice, and group meetings. Beginners benefit if veterans and novices are placed in close proximity. Experienced teachers must be taught how to guide and assist new teachers effectively.

***Degrees of professional growth and responsibilities.*** Beginning teachers should receive assignments that are not as difficult as veterans' assignments, and careful attention should be paid to their placements.

***Minimized evaluation.*** When beginning teachers do not have to be concerned with meeting certification requirements through satisfactory evaluations, induction can be focused where it needs to be—on features of assistance and support. Although new teacher progress should be assessed, the way assessment is implemented is critical.

***Explicit intentions.*** All reviews included in this paper support the development of, and adherence to, clearly articulated induction program goals and purposes, including: (a) to improve student achievement by improving teacher performance, (b) to increase the retention of beginning teachers, (c) to transmit the culture of the school and school system, and (d) to promote the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers.

***Diversified content.*** The most beneficial content of induction programs addresses the needs of new teachers, both instructional content needs and psychological needs, including teachers' problems with classroom management; instruction; workload and stress; time management; and relationships with students, families, colleagues, and administrators.

***Mentoring.*** Mentoring is considered an effective component of new teacher induction programs. Research suggests that the careful training of mentors (usually veteran teachers) results in higher effectiveness. The content of mentor training programs may include adult development and learning, supervision and conferencing skills, and relationship and communication skills. In addition, mentors should be matched to mentees on personality, grade level, and subject area, and also receive release time and/or load reduction for their role as mentors.

***Fiscal and political support.*** Ensuring compensation to mentor teachers in the form of money, status, release time, or graduate credit is an issue. Unless the profession and the public are adequately educated about the importance and ultimate benefits of teacher induction, poor fiscal and political support will continue.

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## SPECIAL EDUCATION INDUCTION

### Conditions of Teaching in Special Education

Conditions of special education teaching are shaped by contextual factors in classrooms and schools determined, in part, by local, state, and federal policies on special education.

***Role ambiguity.*** As novice special educators assume positions in schools, they frequently face ambiguous, conflicting, and fragmented expectations from their colleagues, supervisors, and families of children that they serve.

***Students posing complex challenges coupled with high case loads.*** Novice special educators face the enormous challenge of developing and implementing effective instructional and management strategies for students with severe academic deficits and high rates of inappropriate behaviors.

***Insufficient resources.*** Novice special educators frequently complain that they have insufficient curricular and technical resources, and their curricular responsibilities frequently exceed those of their general education peers—teaching more subject areas to a broader range of ages and ability levels.

***Inadequate administrative support.*** Novice special educators often perceive their administrators as uninterested in the education of students with disabilities.

***Insufficient time.*** Novice special education teachers say that they do not have the time to plan for the diverse needs of their students and that they have difficulty organizing their numerous, varied tasks.

***Lack of opportunities to collaborate.*** Novice special educators complain that they do not have enough opportunities to communicate and plan with their general and special education peers for the benefit of their students.

***Lack of opportunities for professional development.*** Novice special educators say that they rarely have access to professional development related to teaching students with disabilities.

***Procedural demands and excessive paper work.*** Teachers report that completing special education paper work is confusing and burdensome and that they feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of meeting the procedural demands of the special education bureaucracy.

***Inadequate preparation.*** Some new teachers have completed teacher-preparation programs with experiences that have prepared them for their roles; others have not.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Some programs at national, state, and local levels have been developed to consider the unique needs of special educators, and mentoring plays a significant role in these programs.

### Professional Guidelines

CEC's 1997 guidelines for mentoring programs recommend that: (a) each new professional in special education should receive a minimum of a 1-year mentorship during the first year of his or her professional special education practice in a new role, and (b) the mentor should be an experienced professional in the same or a similar role who can provide expertise and support on a continuing basis. This work has been expanded by the Mentoring Induction Project (MIP) and their guidelines (<http://www.cec.sped.org>). The MIP principles and guidelines have been piloted in urban and suburban schools throughout the country.

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## Statewide Programs

Several comprehensive statewide programs are aimed at supporting and retaining new special education teachers, notably The Oregon Recruitment/Retention Project and the Utah Mentor Teacher Academy (UMTA).

## District-Level Programs

Programs targeting induction for special education teachers have been developed and implemented solely by districts. The paper describes several examples, including Fairfax County, Virginia.

## University Input

A university and school district partnership is seen in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program – Special Education (BTSA-SE) in California. The paper describes several university programs with mentoring components in their preparation programs, e.g., Texas A&M and Johns Hopkins University.

## Induction in Alternative Certification

ARCs help beginning teachers learn to teach on the job. For students in ARCs, induction to teaching occurs within the program. Compared to traditional programs, ARCs offer more intense mentoring (i.e., length of time support is provided) and more frequent linkages between school districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Program aspects mentioned in the discussion of alternative certification and induction were from California, Johns Hopkins University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee/Milwaukee Public Schools, University of Texas-El Paso, University of Hawaii, and Southwest Texas State University.

## Links between Mentors and Teacher Preparation Programs

Links between mentors and IHEs in ARCs occur through the selection process, training, and ongoing involvement with supervisors and other program faculty.

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON INDUCTION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS

The paper describes 10 studies that focused on induction activities for first-year special educators. Mentoring often was either the major or sole activity of formal special education induction programs.

### Impact/Outcomes of Mentoring

***Satisfaction and retention.*** All studies reported generally positive results of mentoring arrangements, which in several studies impacted first-year teachers' intentions to remain in teaching for the next 1-5 years.

***Increase in self-confidence.*** Two studies showed that novice teachers with mentors increased in self-confidence.

***Development of collaboration skills.*** Mentorship programs increased collaborative skills, especially with the mentor encouraging rather than inhibiting professional rapport.

***Benefits to mentors.*** In some studies, mentors found that their work with beginning teachers benefited their own personal and professional development.

### Effective Features of Mentoring Programs

***Frequent contact between mentor and mentee.*** Most studies identified time and frequency of contact with a mentor as an important factor influencing teachers' satisfaction with mentorship and success in the first year of teaching. Factors that directly influenced the frequency and extent

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of interactions in mentoring included the proximity of the mentor (e.g., same building), release time for meetings, and routinely scheduled meetings.

***Mentors in special education.*** Studies that examined the characteristics of mentors suggested that mentors should be special educators and preferably that mentors and first-year teachers have similar jobs.

***Non-evaluative role of the mentor.*** A number of studies concluded that a more collegial and beneficial relationship between a mentor and mentee developed in cases where the mentor did not play a role in evaluating teacher performance.

***The mentoring process as understood by mentor and mentees.*** The extent to which mentors understood their role influenced beginning teachers' satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of mentoring.

***Other mentor characteristics.*** Among characteristics that teachers thought were important for special education mentors included personable, open, caring, friendly, comfortable around others, positive, unobtrusive and non-threatening, available, flexible, and trustworthy.

***Content of support.*** Beginning teachers often look for moral support and guidance as they traverse their first year of teaching. Research showed that first-year special education respondents rated emotional support from mentors as the most effective support they received. Many studies pointed to the fact that the content of mentoring is most useful when it is directly related to situations, problems, and issues that individual teachers struggle with in their first year.

***Forms of support.*** The most frequent form of support was found to be face-to-face meetings between mentor and mentee; frequency of support was important.

## **Mentoring and Teacher Development**

The paper reviews in detail a study of first-year teachers—developmental stages and requests of mentors. The timing and intensity of certain types of support impacted teachers' self-confidence, developing competence, and independence.

## **Reports of Other Induction Activities for Special Educators**

Other induction activities that accompanied or were independent of mentoring in some studies were:

- stress management workshops
- peer collaboration training
- new teacher buddy system
- support group meetings
- teacher journaling, release time
- observations of peer teachers
- orientations

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The paper painted a grim picture of the conditions of teaching that many special educators encounter. These conditions are shaped by factors that can result in high teaching loads, insufficient resources, insufficient time, and inadequate administrative support for special education, to name a few. When first-year teachers are faced with these adverse conditions,

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difficulties typically encountered (e.g., time management) are exacerbated. The conditions of teaching present unique needs for induction support and mentoring. Urban schools, in particular, often present particularly challenging working conditions, lack of professional respect, low morale, and a culture of high faculty turnover. If we have learned anything from this review of the literature, it is that induction supports must deal directly with needs that emerge from the unique contexts in which special educators find themselves in their initial teaching years. It is imperative that mentoring programs are designed and mentors selected and prepared to promote beginning teachers' focus on teaching and learning as soon as possible. Important areas for research are: (a) qualities of mentors (e.g., curriculum knowledge, their own focus on teaching and learning, confidence to push novices to move beyond adjustment) and (b) a mentoring process (e.g., intensity, format, feedback mechanisms) that facilitates a focus on students. Support for new teachers prepared outside of traditional teacher education programs is crucial. All new teachers, especially those learning to teach on the job, deserve placements with a reasonable number of students, adequate materials, and supportive colleagues. Beyond mentoring, it is critical that researchers in teacher education examine the type and amount of induction support from both districts and IHEs required to support new teachers learning to teach on the job. For new teachers and their students to achieve their potential and simultaneously improve conditions in schools and special education classrooms, the following factors are needed: (a) strong leadership, (b) shared governance, (c) collaboration, and (d) professional growth.