

Role of the Principal in Beginning Teacher Induction

The positive impact of a leader who creates a caring learning community focused on student success is evident to all, including beginning teachers. Research indicates that inadequate support from school administration is one of the most often reported causes of a new teacher's decision to leave the profession. Principals who are knowledgeable about the issues affecting new teachers, proactive in supporting them, and committed to professional growth do make a significant difference.

Principals also play a critical role in induction by setting the stage for beginning teacher and mentor success, and because new teachers are often placed in classrooms teaching students who most need optimal learning experiences, it is even more important that principals understand and support induction.

To support teacher induction, principals can:

- **BE AWARE OF THE CHALLENGES BEGINNING TEACHERS FACE.** NTC has identified six “attitudinal phases” most beginning teachers experience during their first year of teaching — anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation. Like mentors, principals who know these phases and when they occur can tailor their support throughout the school year. By noticing how they coincide with specific events and responsibilities, such as parent conferences and the grading cycle, a principal can be prepared to better meet the needs of their beginning teachers. Regularly conferring with mentors and beginning teachers about the support needed can help them thrive.
- **REMINDE THE STAFF THAT THE NEW TEACHER IS STILL LEARNING.** In the past, there has been a perception that teachers graduate from pre-service programs as fully-formed teachers, prepared for all the responsibilities they will face. Challenges were not talked about and teachers were expected to keep their mistakes to themselves.
- **VALUE AND ARTICULATE THE VITALITY THAT NEW TEACHERS BRING TO THEIR SCHOOL.** New teachers can be hesitant to share their thinking publicly — during staff meetings or in conversations with principals — heeding the adage that new teachers should be quiet during their first years. Building a community where every person is valued, including the newest members of staff — their understanding of current innovations in teaching strategies and thinking, competence with new technology, and their energy and optimism — goes a long way to make a new teacher feel appreciated and respected.
- **UNDERSTAND THE COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE INDUCTION PROGRAM.** New teacher support should be integrated into overall school goals and professional development plans. Truly effective and sustained induction programs are integral to schools and districts. A principal's ability to explain the components of induction to staff, parents, and the school community and see induction as part of the infrastructure of the school strengthens support for novice teachers. By communicating regularly with district induction leaders, principals can stay current with new requirements, guidelines, and protocols.
- **KNOW THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR.** In the past, and still in many places, a mentor assumed the role of “buddy,” lending an empathetic ear and offering a kind and supportive word. While emotional support is important in building trust, to accelerate beginning teacher growth, mentors must do much more. Instructional mentors focus

their support on teaching and learning. Mentors must have a clear picture of effective teaching, be able to talk about best pedagogical practice and content aligned with rigorous student standards, balance beginning teachers' immediate concerns and long-term growth, and collaboratively build inquiry and reflection as a part of best practice. The principal who knows the strategies and tools that comprise mentor and beginning teacher work — observing and giving feedback, analyzing student work, accessing school and community resources, planning lessons — avoids misunderstandings and aligns support. Knowing the role and responsibilities of both mentor and new teacher sends a clear message of support and respect.

Site Policies, Structures, and Procedures that Support Beginning Teachers

There are numerous ways a principal can model support for beginning teachers.

- Introduce new teachers to their colleagues. Principals might show new teachers around the school and hold a welcome lunch.
- An initial conversation about philosophy, expectations of student learning, clarifying goals, strengths, and areas for focus can lay the foundation for a collegial relationship. Discussing goals, strengths, and challenges helps the principal discover how best to support each new teacher. The principal can explain expectations, the evaluation process, and timeline. As much as possible, principals can align the teacher's assignment to their strengths and abilities. Holding regular meetings with new teachers builds trust and support, provides critical information, and allows for necessary questions.
- Teachers who are most likely to leave the profession are those who are less satisfied than others with their school relationships. They are less likely to strongly agree that their principal created an environment that helped them be an effective teacher, asked for their suggestions, showed appreciation for their work, and treated them with respect. They enter the profession expecting the principal to help them become better teachers.

Mentor and Principal Relationship — Communication, Collaboration, and Coordination

Little is more important in building effective induction programs than the principal and mentor relationship. Principals can inform mentors about school needs,

goals, procedures, policies, and practices, and how best to navigate the school context. They can keep mentors aware of their concerns and offer suggestions for support. Mentors can explain their roles, share sample conversation protocols and formative feedback and assessment tools, articulate expectations for beginning teachers, and note beginning teacher professional learning offered by the induction program. Beginning teachers can benefit from this alignment between the principal and mentor support.

- Principals can schedule regular meetings with mentors. These meetings can be brief check-ins or longer conferences that let principals know the types of support their new teachers are receiving, offer suggestions, and ask questions. Mentors aim to build strong relationships between beginning teachers and principals. Three-way meetings allow mentors to strengthen these interactions so beginning teachers can grow as professionals and assume leadership roles.
- Mentors can make certain that principals understand the rationale for and support confidentiality between a beginning teacher and mentor. In order for beginning teachers to take the necessary risks to grow, they must feel safe. Thus, they must trust that the relationship between themselves and their mentor is confidential. A principal who understands and respects this confidentiality fosters a community of trust. Involved principals develop effective three-way relationships that sanction confidentiality and clearly demonstrate that everyone is working toward a common goal — successful teaching and learning.

Formative Assessment Intersects with Principal Supervision and Evaluation

Formative assessment is a key component in successful induction. It is ongoing, responsive to teacher developmental needs, collaborative, aligned with student content standards and professional teaching standards, and based on multiple data sources. Valuable summative assessment has the same characteristics and is a part of a complete system of assessment. Just as effective student assessment includes ongoing, formative feedback as well as a final, summative assessment, the same holds true for teachers, mentors, and administrators. Often, induction program formative assessment feedback tools and observation instruments are separate from district evaluation. There are a number of ways principals and mentors can integrate teacher assessment:

- **ALIGN PROFESSIONAL GOAL SETTING.** Ideally, the goal setting process is the same in the induction program and district. Because induction programs are often created and added to district programs, two different processes can often exist. Over time, many induction programs have had a positive impact on improving a district's structures, including protocols for setting and working toward professional goals. If beginning teachers experience aligned district and induction goal setting, including the same language and structures, it sends a message that induction is an important part of a district's mission.
- **PRINCIPALS CAN ASSESS BEGINNING TEACHER GROWTH AND EFFECTIVENESS.** Traditionally, principals have been regarded primarily as teacher evaluators, and many administrator preparation programs have not included teacher formative assessment in the curriculum. When principals recognize the power of formative feedback to

improve teacher effectiveness and accelerate growth, it becomes a priority to support ongoing learning. Regular classroom visits focused on a teacher's goals and sanctioned time for self-assessment, send the message of commitment to effective instruction and optimal learning for all students.

Influencing the System

While there must be system-wide support for induction, principals can do much to influence the system. A principal who advocates for reasonable working conditions for new teachers in district policy can change the status quo. Principals can share data of mentor support that resulted in better teaching and learning with stakeholders such as other principals, union representatives, district administrators, the community, and the media. Leadership used in such a powerful way can have a significant influence on sustaining and growing our profession.

Inquiry Questions

1. How does your induction program lead communicate with principals about teacher induction and development? What other strategies can be put in place?
2. What are examples of how some principals in your schools support new teachers? What other strategies can you suggest and help to implement?
3. How can you support principals in including formative feedback in the evaluation process for new teachers? Can the district evaluation protocols be aligned with and integrated into your induction program's formative assessment?
4. How can principals become allies in cultivating or reinforcing system norms of lifelong learning, appropriate working conditions, and valuing new teacher voices?

Resources

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