

## Supporting Special Educators: What School Leaders Should Know

Est. Time: 50 Minutes

### Objective

Identify specific strategies that school administrators can use to support special education teachers.

### Overview

School leaders have a major role in supporting educators in their schools, especially during the first few years of a new teacher's time in the classroom. This critical time is when teachers are enculturated into schools and begin establishing professional practices that they will use for many years. Unfortunately, many new special education teachers describe these crucial first years as overwhelming and stressful. As a result, many of them leave the profession within five years of beginning their careers. Consequently, many schools and districts continue to see a shortage of qualified special educators. Although many agree that some teacher turnover can be healthy, high levels can have a significant impact on student achievement and school stability.

Among the frequently cited reasons teachers offer for leaving their school districts or the teaching profession is a lack of administrative support, both at the district and school levels. On the other hand, special educators who view school leaders' behavior as supportive and encouraging are more likely to remain in their positions. To increase teacher retention, school leaders should seek to understand the challenges typically faced by new special education teachers and the reasons that they leave their positions and to provide appropriate supports to meet their needs.

### Activity

Read at least two of the articles from the list below.

Billingsley, B., Bettini, E., & Jones, N. D. (2019). Supporting special education teacher induction through high-leverage practices. *Remedial and Special Education, 40*(6), 365–379.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bishop, J. (2019). Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say? *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(38). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3722>

Urick, A. (2016). The influence of typologies of school leaders on teacher retention: A multilevel latent class analysis. *Journal of Educational Administration, 54*(4), 434–468.

Vitteck, J. E. (2015). *Promoting special educator teacher retention: A critical review of the literature*. SAGE Open.

### Discussion Topics

1. Listed below are a number of concerns shared by special education teachers and reported in the literature on recruitment and retention. Reflect on these concerns and discuss leadership responses that might have promise for addressing them.
  - a. Isolation
  - b. Unreasonable role demands

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- c. Insufficient feedback
  - d. Settings where collaboration about students with disabilities is rare or discouraged; lack of support for inclusive practice
  - e. Failure to listen to teachers' needs and positions
  - f. Insufficient resources and supplies
  - g. Limited understanding of the needs of children and youth with disabilities
2. Consider the following statement and discuss its implications for educational leaders in responding to the identified concerns.

*Induction or mentoring programs will make little difference if special educators' work environments are poorly designed or they have few opportunities to use their knowledge and skills.*

3. What support do leaders need if they are to more effectively recruit and retain special education teachers?