



Supporting Special Educators: What School Leaders Should Know

Est. Time: 50 Minutes

Objective

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

Overview

One of the frequently cited reasons that teachers give for leaving their school districts or the teaching profession is a lack of administrative support, both at the district and school levels (Billingsley, 2005; Certo & Fox, 2002). Although this is true for both general and special education teachers, research suggest that the odds of a new special education teacher leaving the field are about two and one-half times that of other new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Principals have a major role in supporting special educators in their schools. Special educators who have supportive principals report greater job satisfaction, higher levels of commitment, more professional development opportunities, greater colleague support, fewer role problems, and less stress and burn-out than do their less-supported peers (Billingsley, 2005; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001).

Activity

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

- Billingsley, B. (2005, October). A leader's framework for supporting new special educators. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 18(2), 3–7.
- Certo, C. L., & Fox, J. E. (2002). The work of retaining quality teachers. *The High School Journal*, 86(1), 57–75.
- Gersten, R., Keating, T., Yovanoff, P., & Harniss, M. K. (2001). Working in special education: Factors that enhance special educators' intent to stay. *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 549–567.
- Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring and beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3), 681–714.



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Questions/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
- 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 special needs children and youth

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 to be better equipped to respond?