



CASE STUDY UNIT

Beginning Teacher Support

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Licensure and Content Standards

This IRIS Case Study aligns with the following licensure and program standards and topic areas.

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

NCATE standards are intended to serve as professional guidelines for educators. They also overview the “organizational structures, policies, and procedures” necessary to support them.

- Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions

The Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices (DEC)

The DEC Recommended Practices are designed to help improve the learning outcomes of young children (birth through age five) who have or who are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities.

- Topic 1: Leadership

Beginning Teacher Support Understanding Needs and Concerns

About the Strategy

Special educators have some of the same needs and concerns as other new teachers have, such as learning about district and school policies, the local curriculum, and expectations from colleagues and parents. Teachers from both groups express concerns about managing student behavior, understanding curriculum expectations, and learning how to organize their time and work tasks. However, even given these similarities, the specific nature of special education teachers' concerns may look quite different from that of general educators' concerns. Special educators are less likely than general educators to feel a sense of belonging in their schools (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004), many lack full certification for their positions (Billingsley, 2005a), and they often must develop expertise about the curriculum that spans several grade levels and subjects (Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005). Although some aspects of induction can address both special and general educators' needs, it is important to make sure that the unique issues and concerns that special educators experience are adequately addressed.

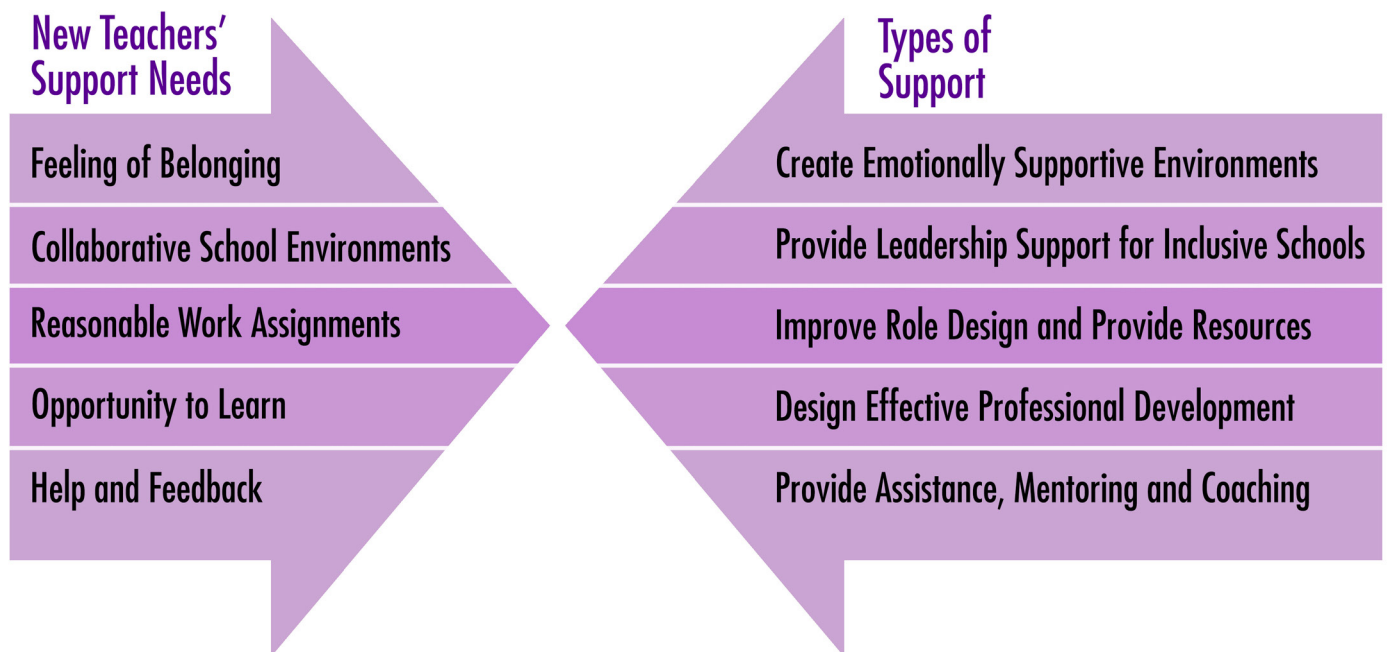
Even among special educators, their needs vary depending on the specific context in which they work and on the nature of their assignments (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Teachers with different types of assignments (e.g., teaching students with low-incidence disabilities versus teaching those with high-incidence disabilities, co-teaching with general educators versus teaching in a resource room) may need different types of support and professional development. The many new special educators who do not have strong preparation will need more intense induction and mentoring programs.

Leaders and mentors who have an understanding of the needs and concerns of the newly hired teachers in their school and who communicate with these teachers on a regular schedule are in a better position to help them make the transition into teaching. They also are better prepared to help new teachers apply what they have learned as they assume full teaching responsibilities.

What the Research and Resources Say

- New teachers usually assume the same work responsibilities as their more experienced peers. These teachers experience a steep learning curve and must adapt to their work settings and learn quickly (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carter, & Yusko, 1999). New teachers must establish routines, negotiate various roles, and learn to apply what they have learned in their teacher preparation programs while at the same time teaching full-time. They must also learn about local policies and procedures, spend time understanding the local curricula, acquire needed resources and materials, and learn to work in the school. New teachers often hold idealistic expectations and subsequently experience "reality shock" as they learn to adjust to the demands of their new careers. It is not surprising that these new teachers often find the first year of teaching stressful and overwhelming.
- New special educators report specific issues that are of concern to them in their first years of teaching. These are grouped into five major areas:
 - Teaching concerns (e.g., assessment of student performance, individual needs, student behavior issues)

- Collaboration concerns (e.g., lack of time for or problems collaborating with general educators, difficulties working with paraprofessionals, challenges with parents)
- Organization and management concerns (e.g., management of varied work tasks, conflicting demands, paperwork, stress)
- Support concerns (e.g., isolation from other special educators, lack of curriculum materials, inadequate administrative support)
- Legal issues (compliance requirements, completion of IEPs)
- The framework below highlights needs of new special educators, which include:
 - Feeling a sense of belonging in their schools
 - Collaborative school environments in which they can work with general educators, specialists, and paraprofessionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities
 - Reasonable work assignments (e.g., reasonable caseloads, no extra responsibilities their first year)
 - Opportunities to continue learning
 - Specific assistance and feedback with work problems (Billingsley, 2005b)



Strategies to Implement

- Take time to get to know new teachers. Keep in mind that the needs of one teacher may look very different from those of another.
- Consider what you have learned about new teachers during the interview process.
- Encourage new teachers to ask questions, and check in frequently about their support needs. Ask, “How are things going?” and “How can we/I (special education department, school, administrator) help?”
- Stop by new teachers’ classrooms, listen to their concerns, observe them, and learn about their needs through informal surveys.
- Encourage new teachers to request assistance in areas of need.
- Consider these overall concerns while planning induction programs.

Keep In Mind

- The context in which teachers work influences what type of help they need. Because special education teachers work in a range of settings, their needs will vary based on the type of roles that they have.
- Although all new special educators need support, they will not necessarily have the same needs. Teachers who are better prepared for their specific assignments will likely have fewer (and different) needs than their less prepared counterparts.
- Many new teachers often are reluctant to seek help, even in the face of crises and challenges.

Resources

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- Billingsley, B., Carlson, E., & Klein, S. (2004). The working conditions and induction support of early career special educators. *Council for Exceptional Children, 70*(3), 333–347.
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- Kilgore, K. L., & Griffin, C. C. (1998). Beginning special educators: Problems of practice and the influence of school context. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 21*, 155–173.
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Beginning Teacher Support Providing Support Through School Leaders

About the Strategy

There are different types of support, including helping new teachers to feel at home in their schools and helping them to become more effective in their work. The figure on the next page highlights five types of support including 1) creating emotionally supportive environments, 2) providing leadership support for inclusive schools, 3) improving role design and providing resources, 4) designing effective professional development, and 5) providing assistance, mentoring, and coaching (Billingsley, 2005b).

What the Research and Resources Say

- Teachers need support from administrators, special education mentors, and others with whom they work in the school (Billingsley, 2005a; Griffin et al., 2003).
- Special educators are less likely than other new teachers to indicate that they feel a sense of belonging in their schools (Billingsley et al., 2004). Because special educators often feel isolated, an essential part of induction includes emotional support (Gold, 1996; Whitaker, 2003). Emotional support is one of the most valued types of support and includes maintaining open communication, taking an interest in the teachers' work, considering their ideas, and showing appreciation for their efforts (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994).
- Supported teachers are more likely than their less supported colleagues to report:
 - Job satisfaction
 - Commitment to their work
 - Greater colleague support
 - Fewer role problems
 - Less stress and burnout(Gersten et al., 2001)
- Administrative support increases the likelihood that teachers will stay in their assignments (Boe, Barkanic, & Leow, 1999).
- Special educators indicate that a supportive principal is the top-rated incentive for remaining in special education.
- Support is multifaceted and involves both emotional and instructional support (Gold, 1996).

Five Types of Teacher Support
(TABLE 1)

New Teacher Support Needs	Types of Support	Example
A sense of belonging	Create emotionally supportive environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a welcoming district and school environment. • Tell teachers you are available to help. • Take an interest in the teachers' work. • Facilitate informal interactions. • Listen to teachers. • Treat the new teachers as professionals. • Recognize new teachers' accomplishments.
Collaborative school environments	Provide leadership support for inclusive schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage collaborative relationships among general and special education teachers and others who work with students with disabilities. • Provide models for collaboration. • Help teachers clarify their responsibilities. • Assure time for collaboration. • Encourage mentor teachers to include new special educators in their collaborative work.
Reasonable work assignments	Improve role design and provide resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify new teachers' roles and responsibilities. • Make sure responsibilities are reasonable. • Avoid assigning extracurricular responsibilities in the first year. • Provide space and materials and assist with schedule as needed.
Opportunities to learn	Provide professional development support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess new teachers' needs to determine priorities for professional development. • Carefully select professional development goals that are most crucial. • Provide well-designed professional development programs including ongoing assistance, coaching, and administrative support, which are critical for teacher growth and the establishment of new behaviors. • Discuss behavior management, adapting instruction in general education classrooms, collaboration, writing IEPs, and using research-based instructional methods with new special educators.
Specific assistance and feedback	Provide assistance and coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide willing and trained special education mentors. • Include opportunities for observation and feedback. • Provide opportunities for new teachers to visit other programs. • Provide opportunities to discuss new teachers' concerns. • Model the steps of problem-solving and help the new teachers identify local resources for assistance. • Help with scheduling, organization, and time and stress management.

Keep In Mind

- Support must be individualized and should address new teachers' needs in relationship to the contexts in which they work (Rosenberg, Griffin, Kilgore, & Carpenter, 1997).
- Support needs will vary across the school year.

Strategies to Implement

- Help mentors and other teachers in the school understand the varied types of support.
- Evaluate the extent to which new teachers feel supported.
- Create a support team for each new teacher and outline the types of support (see Table 1) that each team member will provide.

Resources

- Billingsley, B. (2005a). *Cultivating and keeping committed special educators: What principals and district administrators can do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press (Co-published with the Council for Exceptional Children), pp. 1–230.
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Beginning Teacher Support Creating Induction Programs for Special Educators

About the Strategy

Induction is a broad concept that includes support, guidance, and orientation for new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Components of induction programs may include orientation programs, school and peer support teams, visits to other schools, and mentoring programs (Billingsley, 2005). Induction takes place at different levels, including the district, the school, and the special education program levels, sometimes even including a university level in collaboration with schools. These latter collaborations recognize that induction actually begins during teacher preparation and continues into the early years of teaching. Those who are involved in university-school collaboration need to agree on the goals and components of the program and to commit the necessary resources to achieve those goals. Ideally, induction programs are carefully conceptualized with a clear understanding of the roles that district and school leaders, teacher mentors, and others play in creating a positive climate and in providing new teacher supports.

What the Research and Resources Say

- Effective induction programs require significant resources from local, state, and top-level administrators. To secure this support, the benefits of high-quality induction need to be shared with decision makers in terms of teacher retention, student achievement, and actual cost savings to districts (New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 2006).
- Carefully designed induction programs are well conceptualized and have explicitly stated goals. Induction goals vary across districts but often include 1) assisting new teachers in learning and refining research-based practices; 2) orienting teachers to local policies, curriculum, and procedures; 3) providing a positive culture for new teachers and facilitating their transition into teaching; and 4) increasing retention. Developing policies about orientation; peer support; and mentor selection, training, and compensation are often included as part of induction planning (Griffin et al., 2003).
- Special education induction needs to be coordinated with larger induction programs within districts. Which components will be the same? Which will be different? Who will be responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the extent to which new special educators' needs are met? Special educators who participate in local teacher induction programs will have opportunities to collaborate with general educators in the district, and such collaboration may help reduce the isolation that special educators sometimes report. However, it is also critical to assess the degree to which the local induction program meets special educators' needs. Special educators may need some specific elements that are designed especially for them. For example, special educators may benefit from district-level special education supports, from opportunities to meet with other new special educators in the district, and, in some situations, from professional development that is geared toward a particular need.

- Ideally, special education orientation will take place early in the year, with additional meetings scheduled a few times throughout the teacher's first year in the district. Both district and school orientations are needed to review critical information about how the school and district operate. Ideas for the content of these meetings include:
 - The special education district/agency mission and philosophy, roles and responsibilities of key personnel
 - District/agency expectations (educator roles and responsibilities)
 - Characteristics (culture) of special education department
 - Introduction of district support staff
 - Special education support staff availability and access instructions
 - Paperwork requirements, procedures, and timelines (sample forms, i.e., IEP form)
 - Assessment and referral process for children with suspected disabilities
 - Policies regarding student records (confidentiality, storage, etc.)
 - Available materials and other resources (audiovisual equipment, instructional materials, resource centers, etc.)
 - Procedures for ordering supplies, equipment, instructional materials
 - Staff list

(Bulleted list retrieved May 24, 2005, from <http://www.tr.wou.edu/bridges/orientationPage1a.htm>)

School orientation is important in helping the new teacher understand key factors for functioning in the school: the school mission; his or her roles and responsibilities, as well as those of other staff members; the curriculum and materials used in the school; secretarial assistance; and policies for handling records (retrieved May 24, 2005, from <http://www.tr.wou.edu/bridges/orientationPage1a.htm>).

- Consider new teacher support meetings to provide opportunities for new teachers to solve problems and share experiences. For example, a special education director might schedule a monthly breakfast for new special educators.

Strategies to Implement

- Provide new teachers with an overview of the district's induction goals, policies, and components so they are aware of available resources to help them in their first year.
- Provide written or Web-based resources for new teachers (e.g., district manual, guides for new teachers, relevant Websites). A written explanation of the teacher evaluation process also helps with expectations and reduces uncertainty.
- Consider providing guidelines for effective practices in key areas, such as working with paraprofessionals, managing stress in the first year, collaborating with general educators, and working with parents.

Keep In Mind

- If possible, reduce the number of role expectations, case load, or the number of preparations during the first year, and avoid assigning extracurricular activities.
- Too many induction activities can be overwhelming and counterproductive. Be explicit about which induction activities are required and which are voluntary.

Resources

- Billingsley, B. (2005). *Cultivating and keeping committed special educators: What principals and district administrators can do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press (Co-published with the Council for Exceptional Children), pp. 1–230.
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- Shelton, C. F., & Pollingue, A. B. (2001). *The exceptional teacher's handbook: The first-year special education teacher's guide for success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
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Beginning Teacher Support Offering Mentor Programs for Special Educators

Mentoring refers to individual guidance provided for new teachers by experienced teachers.

- Mentors help by offering various types of assistance. Mentors have been described as guides, listeners, and observers. They serve as confidants and consultants and help the teacher through difficult times and situations. They are non-judgmental, respectful, and available, and they serve as models for new teachers.
- New special educators need experienced and knowledgeable special education mentors. Although best practice suggests that new teachers and their mentors will work in the same school so that new teachers can receive timely assistance, sometimes mentors from other schools can assist through periodic visits and e-mail.
- Mentors need to be carefully selected. Mentors need to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to form supportive relationships with new teachers. Identifying criteria for mentor selection is important. Some possible criteria might be the desire to be a mentor, at least 3 years teaching experience, optimism, and strong communication skills.
- Mentoring does not just happen during the first year. The strongest programs are multi-year programs. Recent research suggests that the deepest learning in the teachers' development occurs in years two and three (New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 2006).
- Mentor preparation often involves a discussion of the roles of the mentor, typical issues for new teachers and mentors, how to establish trust and build relationships, specific ways to provide instructional support and feedback, and materials and resources helpful to new teachers.
- Mentor relationships should be supportive and should avoid evaluation. If mentoring is designed to help teachers grow and develop in their new roles, then a trusting, open relationship between the mentor and mentee is essential (Griffin et al., 2002; White & Mason, 2001). Early agreements about confidentiality need to be established and communicated so that leaders, mentors, and teachers understand the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship.
- School administrators should encourage informal mentoring relationships. In addition to the special education mentor, other teachers or staff at the school may be asked to help the new teacher during the first year. These teachers can serve as informal mentors, include the teacher as part of the school community, answer questions, and provide perspectives.
- Mentoring programs should be evaluated to ensure that they are helpful to new special educators. (Billingsley et al., 2004). Evaluation questions include 1) were the goals of induction met? 2) was the program implemented as planned? and 3) what changes are needed to improve the program?
- Mentoring works best when mentors and mentees have regularly scheduled time to work together.
- Mentors need to be compensated for their time and efforts. Options may include additional pay, graduate credit, or funds to attend conferences.

Resources

- Billingsley, B. (2002). *Beginning special educators: Characteristics, qualifications, and experiences*. SPeNSE Factsheet. Retrieved March, 2002, from <http://www.spense.org>
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Scenario

Jamal Radcliffe, a special education director, has been assigned to organize an induction program for all new special educators entering the district. Although Jamal has taught special education in the past, he knows little about induction and mentoring and little about how to design, implement, and evaluate such programs, as well. He needs to begin planning for the new teachers who will arrive in the fall, and he has only a few months to pull this program together. Jamal has a range of questions: What is induction and mentoring anyway? What are the needs and concerns of new special education teachers? Are they different from those of other teachers? Should special and general educators participate in the same induction programs or should they have different experiences? Who is in the best position to support new special education teachers? Jamal has two major goals, which are 1) to review the knowledge base on supporting new special educators and 2) to outline key considerations in designing strong induction programs.

Possible Strategies

- Understanding needs and concerns of new special educators
- Providing support through school leaders and teachers
- Creating induction programs for special educators
- Offering mentor programs for special educators



Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Summarize what Jamal needs to know about the needs of new special educators.
3. Outline five types of support that need to be included in induction programs.
4. Assume a specific role (e.g., district administrator, school principal, teacher mentor) and suggest specifically how you would support new special educators.

Scenario

Helen Thorton, the principal at Marymount Elementary, hopes to better support the new teachers in her building. She hired two new special educators and four new general education teachers. Although there is a formal induction program in the district, she knows that, in the past, special educators have not always participated. She wonders why and how the needs of the new special educators are similar to and different from those of new general education teachers. Helen knows that both general and special education teachers will participate in the district-wide induction program; yet, she also knows that special educators may have needs that will not be met in the broader program. Helen wants to begin planning for what she and the other teachers in the school can do to support these new teachers.

Possible Strategies

- Understanding needs and concerns of new special educators
- Providing support through school leaders
- Creating induction programs for special education
- Offering mentor programs for special educators



Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Summarize what Helen's role should be in supporting new teachers.
3. Provide specific considerations for supporting new special educators. To respond to this assignment, students should provide three examples under each of the five types of support.
4. Specify what Helen can do to facilitate strong mentoring programs for special educators.

Scenario

Lisa Holst, a special education teacher, has volunteered to be a mentor teacher for Audrey, a new special educator in her school. Lisa just met with her principal, Nancy Schumann, to discuss her role. Lisa has been teaching special education for more than 15 years but has never served as a mentor teacher. Although Nancy indicated her willingness to help, she didn't share any specific ideas with Lisa. Both Lisa and Nancy acknowledged the importance of getting to know Audrey and discovering her interests and needs. Lisa and Nancy also agreed that they want to identify helpful resources and take advantage of any research that has been conducted on mentoring and supporting new special educators. Lisa left Nancy's office and has since identified two major goals for getting started. First, Lisa wants to review recent research on supporting and mentoring new special educators, and, second, she wants to work with Audrey to develop an overall plan for the year.

Possible Strategies

- Understanding needs and concerns of new special educators
- Providing support through school leaders
- Offering mentor programs for special educators



Assignment

1. Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
2. Write a summary of the types of concerns new special educators experience.
3. Outline key considerations for mentoring new special education teachers.
4. Based on what you have read, suggest possible induction activities that Lisa might consider as she works with Audrey.

Scenario

Adam Logan, the special education director, plans to develop an induction and mentoring program for the 32 new special educators in the district. He will begin to discuss the program at the spring meeting with the district principals. Adam knows that his time with this group is always limited, and he wants to make the most of this 90-minute meeting. He is trying to decide the best strategy for involving the principals and soliciting their support. From past experience, he knows that some of the principals have not been that supportive of new special educators, and he is concerned that some of these new teachers do not have a chance to survive without greater principal support.

Possible Strategies

- Understanding needs and concerns of new special educators
- Providing support through school leaders
- Creating induction programs for special educators
- Offering mentor programs for special educators



Assignment

- Read the STAR Sheets on the possible strategies listed above.
- Develop three goals that Adam should have for his meeting with the principals, and provide a rationale for each goal.
- Summarize the key points that Adam should make to accomplish these goals.

Scenario

Martha Coleman, the principal of Faulkner County High School (FCHS), has just hired two new special education teachers, Roberta and Eli. Roberta is well prepared for her special education position. She graduated with honors from a prestigious special education program and completed a year-long internship in an elementary school during the second year of her master's program. Martha is impressed with Roberta's enthusiasm for her new job and her commitment to being a special education teacher. Roberta will work as a consulting special education teacher for three periods each day in English and math, and she also will provide instruction to selected students during scheduled resource periods each afternoon.

Eli Hartz is also a new special educator who will work primarily as a co-teacher of science and social studies in special education classrooms in the 9th and 10th grades. Eli has a strong liberal-arts background, and he worked for two years after college in a wilderness program for adolescent boys with emotional and behavioral problems. He just completed his first semester of his master's program in special education and is currently enrolled in a three-hour course titled "Methods of Teaching Students With Mild Disabilities."

Martha is concerned about the high attrition among new special education teachers in the district and wonders what she might have done to retain the two teachers who left last year. Although Roberta is well prepared and Eli has experience with adolescent boys, Martha wonders about how she and others in the school might support Roberta and Eli during their first years as teachers. Martha has two major goals: She first wants to better understand the support needs of Roberta and Eli, and she also wants to plan supports for these two teachers based on their needs and concerns.



Assignment

Using the STAR Sheets in this unit,

1. Compare the needs of Roberta and Eli.
2. Develop an induction goal that might be appropriate for both Roberta and Eli.
3. Design a support plan for Martha to implement. What should she do immediately? What might she delegate to others?