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Keeping Good Teachers

Edited by Marge Scherer

[Table of Contents](#)

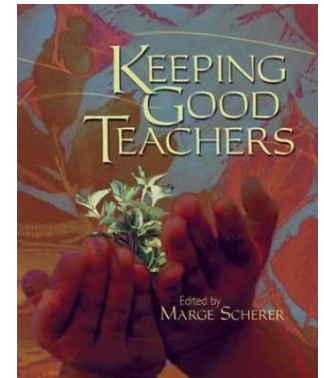
Chapter 4. The Principal's Role in New Teacher Induction

by Cynthia L. Carver

Each time a teacher resigns, the hiring process must begin anew. While veteran teachers lament or applaud the loss of a colleague, the building principal posts a job opening and assembles a hiring team in hopes of securing the most able candidate. As summer fades and the new school year approaches, veteran staff members will join forces with the principal to orient the replacement, assign a mentor, and shuffle scarce resources so that the newcomer feels welcomed and equipped to start the year. If everything goes well, the new teacher will eventually become a full and contributing member of the staff. But in too many cases, the newcomer will resign in the next year or two, and the scenario will repeat itself.

Research has found that large proportions of new teachers leave the profession within their first three to five years, just as they are getting their professional feet wet (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Many find the job impossible and the demands too great. Many new teachers leave the profession because of poor working conditions, including low pay and status. Others leave because of a lack of support from administrators, colleagues, students, and parents (Ingersoll, 2001).

Public concern over alarming new teacher attrition and retention rates has helped fuel widespread interest in formal induction programs. Policymakers see induction as a possible solution to multiple problems: a way to improve teaching, raise retention rates, eliminate the unfit, and



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increase student achievement (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Huling-Austin, 1990).

Traditionally, discussions of teacher induction have not considered the role of the school principal (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Researchers and experts typically limit their recommendations for principal support of induction to program advocacy and beginning-of-the-year orientations (Brock & Grady, 2001). But principals at least have the responsibility of evaluating new teachers and fostering workplace conditions that support their development. Shouldn't principals play a larger role in supporting beginning teachers?

Core Induction Tasks for Principals

To better understand what effective principals do to support, develop, and assess their newest teachers, I followed four elementary principals—each of whose schools operated a highly regarded induction program—for three years (Carver, 2002). Drawing on their work, I identified a set of core tasks through which principals can support novice teachers (see Figure 4.1). These include recruiting, hiring, and placing new teachers; providing orientation to the site and resource assistance; managing the school environment; building relationships between principals and teachers; providing leadership for instructional development through formative and summative evaluation; and facilitating a supportive school context.¹

Figure 4.1. Core Tasks for Principals in Supporting New Teachers

Recruiting, Hiring, and Placing New Teachers

- Recruit aggressively; streamline and facilitate the hiring process
- Hire early so that the novices can settle in
- Assign novices to subject areas and grade levels for which they are qualified
- Secure classroom placements that optimize the novices' chance for success
- Distribute challenging students among classrooms
- Protect novices' time by limiting extra duties and responsibilities

Providing Site Orientation and Resource Assistance

- Facilitate introduction and welcome to the site
- Offer site orientation to highlight available resources, procedures, and policies
- Assign in-building mentors (if not already provided)
- Provide needed resources and supplies

Managing the School Environment

- Clearly articulate expectations for teachers
- Streamline state and district paperwork
- Protect novices from the competing demands of state and district mandates
- Maintain a disciplined school environment

Building Relationships Between Principals and Teachers

- Maintain regular personal communication with the novice
- Acknowledge and reward performance, as appropriate
- Maintain an open-door policy; ask how you can be helpful

Fostering Instructional Development Through Formative Assessment

- Facilitate novices' participation in professional development opportunities
- Provide opportunities and incentives for all teachers to work together
- Provide opportunities for novices to gather and work together
- Protect planning time for novices
- Visit novices' classrooms and provide feedback; help novices set reasonable goals
- Review lesson plans; offer instruction in teaching strategies
- Facilitate novices' observation of other teachers
- Engage in ongoing professional dialogue with novices

Providing Formative and Summative Evaluation

- Explain expectations and procedures at the beginning of the year
- Schedule observations in advance; provide novices with copies of evaluation records
- Use standards to guide your assessment
- Be positive but honest in your feedback; recognize novices as beginners
- Help novices set reasonable goals for their learning and development
- Balance formal observations and conferences with informal observations and feedback
- Coordinate evaluation activities with induction and mentoring program

Facilitating a Supportive School Context

- Foster a welcoming, nurturing, and collegial work environment that values critical inquiry, reflection, and risk taking
- Help other teachers understand and acknowledge novices' development and needs
- Set high expectations for teaching and learning and make them clear to all
- Use teaching standards to structure professional development opportunities
- Model collaborative working behavior

None of the four principals considered new teacher support to be an added aspect of their work. Rather, they incorporated various combinations of these strategies willingly and naturally into their daily routines. Supporting new teachers was simply part of the job.

New Teacher Recruiting, Hiring, and Placing

Effective principals recruit aggressively and then streamline the hiring process so that novices are quickly brought on board and have a chance to settle in before the school year begins. After new teachers are hired, effective principals make sure to place them in their areas of expertise and licensure, provide them with adequate resources to meet their needs, and assign them only limited extra duties and responsibilities to optimize their chance of success. In the words of one principal, "I really want them to focus on their teaching the first year. I don't want to distract them from that because they form their habits so early in their careers. I want them to concentrate on improving the quality of their teaching." To protect the novice's time, this principal takes care to limit the number of new teacher committee assignments to two: one requiring a light commitment and a second requiring a medium commitment.

Providing Site Orientation and Resource Assistance

After they are hired and placed, new teachers need to become acquainted with the way their new school does things. Principals can help meet this need by sponsoring a building-level orientation at the opening of the school year to review key policies and procedures. In addition, principals may assign mentor or buddy teachers, thereby establishing a formal network of support for the novice. Principals can also help the new teacher obtain needed resources and supplies. As the year unfolds, effective principals tailor their actions to meet the individual needs of new teachers. As one principal said:

It's the nuts and bolts. What do the teachers need so that they can do their job? Basic information about how the school works, the ins and outs, all the things that even as a student teacher you may not have been aware of, but that an experienced teacher takes for granted. We have an understanding that a lot of those pieces are missing and they need to be developed for that first-year teacher, so we try to be sensitive to that and support people and get those pieces in place.

Managing the School Environment

New teachers find it reassuring to know that their principal can be trusted to physically maintain the building and hold students accountable for acting in a responsible manner. Principals who facilitate a disciplined and orderly school environment enable the new teacher to concentrate on teaching students, rather than just managing them.

Principals can also help keep the new teacher's focus on teaching by streamlining such routine administrative tasks as the completion of state and district reports. For example, one principal passes on to the new teacher only those administrative requests that cannot be filled by office staff. In her words, "My vested interest is that new teachers do their job with as little disruption and as little confusion as possible."

Building Relationships Between Principals and Teachers

Although principals are busy people, it is important that they take time to get to know the new teachers in their school and establish working relationships with them—for example, by welcoming new teachers to the site, maintaining an open-door policy, being available for individual conferences, and attending to new teachers' real and perceived needs. The key is to facilitate a professional relationship between the novice and principal, as well as among peers throughout the system. Doing so opens the door to deeper and more substantive conversations, as noted by the principal who said:

I'll ask about their families. I'll ask them about their kids. I develop a strong relationship with them. They know that I care about them as people. That relationship takes us a long way. It really opens the door for me to talk to them about superior performance.

Establishing a strong working relationship is particularly important when concerns arise about a new teacher's performance. As one principal said:

When you have a comfortable relationship with a person, you can coach that person. So I am really conscious of building relationships with people so that they can be open to feedback. Without a rapport, it is hard to work with people, especially when you have concerns.

Providing Formative and Summative Assessment

Even when a school uses mentors, principals can play a significant role in promoting new teachers' development. Effective principals provide formative assessment by regularly visiting classrooms, reviewing lesson plans, and providing immediate feedback to their new teachers. They clearly express performance expectations, help novices set reasonable goals, and routinely engage in "pedagogical talk" with their teachers.

During the summative evaluation process, effective principals communicate their expectations clearly to the novice, focus their observations around the new teacher's explicit needs, and approach the process as trusted colleagues. Effective principals also coordinate evaluation activities with induction and mentoring programs to prevent unnecessary overlap or conflicting expectations. As one principal remarked, the process of conducting new teacher evaluations, including communication with the new teacher's mentor, actually helps her focus on new teachers' needs: "I

don't like putting in the time, but it makes me think about each individual teacher, what is special about them, and their strengths and weaknesses . . . so it gets me to focus in."

Less visible, but equally important, effective principals encourage novices to work with other teachers to develop their instructional skills, through coplanning and coteaching, for example, or through observing in veteran teachers' classrooms. As one principal noted, "I encourage people to visit one another. I really facilitate opportunities for people to share things that are happening."

Facilitating a Supportive School Context

Of all the efforts effective principals undertake to support new teachers, building and sustaining a supportive school culture may be the most elusive. All teachers benefit from pleasant and collegial work environments, professional standards, and the development of a shared language around a common mission. Above all, the principal needs to establish high expectations for both student learning and teacher learning. In the words of one principal, "You start with making teachers feel good about themselves and what they are doing. Make them feel that this is a safe, risk-free environment for teaching and learning. If you set that up and do it consciously, they are going to do the work that they are about, which is intellectual."

The Little Things Add Up

Although principals can support, develop, and evaluate new teachers in countless ways, no principal in this study came close to doing it all. Rather, they reported picking and choosing among various alternatives, basing their decision on at least three things: the stated or perceived learning needs of the novice; the availability of school-based resources, both human and material; and their own skills and preferences as leaders.

The principal's role in supporting new teachers is therefore likely to shift with changing needs, interests, and contexts. For example, the principal may provide an orientation for all new teachers at the beginning of the academic year, but take different actions to support individual teachers as the school year progresses. He or she may encourage a young teacher struggling with classroom management to attend a seminar on the topic and give the teacher release time to observe in the classroom of his or her mentor. To help a new teacher who has an especially challenging set of students, the principal may assign a classroom assistant for part of the day.

Whatever specific actions principals decide to take, it's important that they demonstrate their care and concern. Gestures, large and small, add up. This is particularly true when the principal's actions are immediately visible. The novice teacher benefits when the principal quietly asks a colleague next door to keep an eye on the classroom, but gains even more if the principal personally observes in the classroom and offers counseling and advice.

District-Level Leadership

Principals have a critical role to play in new teacher support, development, and assessment. However, building capacity for that work rightfully rests on the shoulders of school district leadership. If school districts are serious about retaining new teachers, they need to encourage and support principal development in this area. They should expect principals to publicly articulate support for new teacher induction and mentoring and

demonstrate visible on-site support for program work and activities. In addition, districts should encourage their principals to participate in program development and evaluation, including the selection and coordination of mentors.

To do this important work, principals must be knowledgeable about induction program goals and activities. They need to demonstrate an understanding of mentors' work with new teachers, including a healthy respect for mentor-novice confidentiality, and they need to become more aware of new teacher development and learning needs. School districts should provide meaningful professional development opportunities for principals that are focused on the effective practice of new teacher support, development, and assessment.

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Endnote

¹ These core principal support tasks have wide support in the literature. For examples, see Brock and Grady (2001); Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, and Fideler (1999); Donaldson and Poon (1999); Fideler and Haselkorn (1999); National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996); Odell and Huling (2000); Portner (2001); and Villani (2002).

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