01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 1

New Special Education Teachers 1

VIGNETTE

In November, a new special education teacher came to our school to take the position of one of our teachers going on maternity leave. Although she had one year of teaching experience as a regular education teacher, she had no experience in exceptional student education. Good teaching is good teaching, but strategies for teaching students with disabilities are critical, not to mention the maze of paperwork that is inherent in our job. The teaching is the easy part. It's the paperwork that makes special education teachers crazy!

We worked together to make sure that she was off on the right foot, and thanks to the teacher who had left, no IEP annual evaluations were looming in the immediate future. This "too-good-to-be-true" scenario lasted about six weeks, and then it happened. In mid-December, the district required that all third-grade IEPs must be reviewed in response to the Third Grade Retention law passed by the Legislature. Not only did the IEPs need to be reviewed, but also revised in the areas of "present level of performance" and "goals" to reflect the five elements of reading instruction deemed essential by research. All this had to be completed by January 31, a task most veteran special education teachers would find daunting.

Together, we spent many hours together learning these new directives, implementing them on our computerized IEP program, and meeting with parents concerning the revisions and their child's new IEP. As far as my protégé was concerned, it was "sink or swim" and "take the bull by the horns" time all rolled into one. She never complained, and by the second week in January, she was feeling like a "pro." With a lot of hard work and a few late afternoons, we completed our reviews on time and developed a professional rapport that will last far into the future

—Patricia Weber

WHO ARE NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS?

The mentor teacher and mentee in the vignette experienced the rewards of a close and supportive working relationship that, fortunately, will remain intact after the mentee's first year of teaching in special education is complete. Without the support from the special education mentor, the mentee would have been "left to the sharks" to navigate the enormous paperwork maze initiated by the state and local school district. One may be thinking, Is this vignette a realistic expectation for beginning special education teachers to hold?

WHERE THEY COME FROM

The term "new special education" teacher holds different meaning for these individuals who took various routes to arrive in their current teaching positions. New special education teachers are as diverse as the students they teach. Mentees in this group may be graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs, experienced special education teachers new to the district or disability area, teachers with an education degree in another field, participants in alternative certification programs, or individuals without any educational training.

Traditional Teacher Preparation Programs. Traditionally trained special education teachers have completed formal teacher preparation programs that are likely approved by their state departments of education. Most university teacher preparation programs prepare teachers for positions in a cross- or noncategorical service delivery model. For example, in one southeastern state special education teacher certification is called Exceptional Student Education and covers kindergarten through twelfth grade. This certification enables a special education teacher to teach all levels and types of students with disabilities except for the severe, deaf, and blind. In Illinois, when certified in special education, you are classified as a Learning and Behavior Specialist and are able to teach the high-incidence disabilities. Traditional teacher preparation programs require individuals to complete many hours of course credit in teaching reading, mathematics, and special education strategies, as well as complete a supervised teaching experience. Upon graduation, many of these teachers may feel ready to take charge of their own classroom and teach without the continual supervision of a cooperating teacher. Although this group of beginning special education teachers may have the knowledge about how to teach students with disabilities, they do not have the depth of experience needed to independently sustain them through the bumps and pitfalls of the first year. Nor are they savvy to the district or school procedures. One beginning special education teacher, as quoted in Whitaker (2000a) says, "For the most part in school all we learned is theory . . . Nothing prepares you for teaching until you start teaching" (p. 2).

These beginning teachers may lack confidence in their abilities and require emotional support from their mentors. Reassurance and active listening will

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 3

help build the new teacher's confidence, and, like their students, the mentee will need frequent reinforcement at the beginning of the year with a gradual fading of support. One way to view the support of the mentor teacher is to use the analogy of a builder who is remodeling a tall building. The teacher sets up scaffolding around a building to use as his support while working on a particular area. As each area is complete and strong, the builder removes the scaffolding. The mentor teacher is similar to the scaffold support, providing strong support that is gradually removed as the mentee gains confidence and experience. An effective mentor will be a valuable resource for this group of mentees throughout the first year of teaching.

In addition to recent graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs, a unique group of special education teachers who can benefit from having a mentor are experienced special education teachers who are first-year teachers in a new school district. These teachers may have rich backgrounds of teaching students with disabilities and may feel competent with their teaching skills, designing and implementing instruction and working with paraeducators and parents. Despite their experience, these mentees will still need support. Mentors can provide emotional support to these teachers and assist with issues such as the school district's policies and procedures, paperwork, and orientation to the school building.

Although most mentees welcome support, it is realistic to expect that some will not. Mentors must be prepared that some experienced special education teacher mentees may feel insulted that they were assigned a mentor. Some veteran special education teachers may feel that learning paperwork and procedures is simplistic and easily completed on their own, whereas others may view accepting help as a sign of deficiency. Lisa, a mentor teacher, was asked to mentor a new faculty member who was a seasoned teacher new to the school district. She explained, "I tried many times to contact my mentee by e-mail and telephone. I even left messages with her fellow associates. Just when I was about to concede, I received an e-mail from her. She politely and diplomatically informed me of her prior teaching experience, thanked me for showing interest and concern, and let me know that she had everything under control." Lisa was disappointed about her mentee's lack of interest, and one variable she attributed to the lack of success in the relationship was that the seasoned teacher was assigned to work with Lisa rather than given the chance to request a mentor. Had the new teacher asked for a mentor, Lisa believes the relationship would have been successful. Fortunately for Lisa, she found and mentored another teacher who valued her contributions.

Some special education teachers may have taught students with mild disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities) and, because of choice or assignment, began teaching students with severe disabilities (e.g., autism). The state department of education often requires this group of professionals to complete college coursework or participate in school district–sponsored skill development workshops to be considered certified teachers. For example, one of this book's authors, Jim, is a certified teacher in the area of behavior disorders. One year when teaching elementary students, he was considered out-of-field or uncertified according to state guidelines because his assignment was to teach a class of

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 4

students with learning disabilities. Jim was required to submit his transcripts to the state for a coursework review or complete several courses in the area of learning disabilities to be considered an in-field teacher. In Jim's case, he had already completed ample coursework on learning disabilities and was granted certification in specific learning disabilities. If he did not have a strong background in the area of learning disabilities, his mentor could have provided curriculum support. Because many state departments of education focus on streamlining teacher certification by offering test-only routes or alternative routes to special education teacher certification, scenarios such as Jim's are becoming less frequent, and the number of out-of-field teachers is decreasing.

Out-of-Field Teachers. Some certified teachers may not be certified in special education (e.g., a teacher certified in middle grades who begins teaching special education). This type of teacher should have a solid understanding of the school culture and classroom management techniques but does not have strategic knowledge to design lessons for students with severe disabilities. The same principle would hold true for an elementary general education teacher who decided to teach special education students with mild disabilities. He or she may benefit more from curriculum support in specific learning strategies or making accommodations rather than from support in classroom management strategies.

Alternate Certification Programs. Mentees who have completed or are currently enrolled in alternative certification programs have a range of experiences. These individuals are typically embarking on a second career so they may have professional knowledge in one or more subject areas and may have worked with individuals with disabilities in the community. The increased development and use of alternative certification programs is growing as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and the nationwide critical shortage of special education teachers (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). For example, Florida school districts are allowed to design their own alternative certification programs to provide uncertified mentees with the skills needed to become teachers. Some of the school districts in Southeast Florida have partnered with Florida Atlantic University's (FAU) Department of Exceptional Student Education Comprehensive System of Personnel Development to offer a collaboratively designed teacher development program. This program was designed through the expertise of special education personnel of the school districts and FAU faculty in special education. Mentoring programs built upon university-school partnerships can help promote the widespread use of mentoring programs and promote school reform because mentees learn new pedagogies and professional norms from their mentors (Feiman-Nesmer, 1996).

The FAU teacher development program is year long, delivered in an alternate format that consists of 12 modules containing content such as assessing student performance, writing lesson plans and IEPs, designing instructional programs, and using technology. Several local school districts have adopted this as their special education alternative certification program. Each local school district pays the mentee's discounted university tuition, and the mentee's

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 5

complete the program as a cohort. Special education–specific alternative certification programs, like the FAU program, which are built on a university and school district partnership, often contain the skills and knowledge uncertified teachers need to become competent.

Many times the school district's generic alternative certification program is required for all teachers to complete. A generic program may help most teachers and provide general information on relevant topics, but it may not have the specialized content needed to ensure the success of special education mentees. If the generic alternative certification program is the only one available, the mentee will require even more support from his or her mentor teacher to learn the necessary skills to become a competent special education teacher.

Some mentees may be employed as special education teachers as they complete the alternative certification program, whereas others may have completed the alternative certification program before securing a teaching position. The needs of these mentees will vary depending on the quality of their alternative certification program, their completion or progress point in the program, and their backgrounds. In many instances, mentees who have completed an alternative certification program require less support than those still participating in the program. Other mentees with strong content backgrounds, such as the case of a former engineer who is now teaching high school math to students with disabilities, will require less support in the content area and greater support in areas such as designing differentiated lesson plans, making accommodations, and classroom management. Mason and White (2001) caution that, "Teachers trained under alternative certification programs need more help and guidance than the typical mentoring program provides" (p. 80). Mentors and mentoring program developers will have to closely monitor the needed supports of this group.

Individuals Without Any Educational Training. The mentee with a degree in psychology who is teaching students in special education needs a high level of support in all areas, including teaching reading and math, learning strategies, managing behavior, as well as designing lesson plans and writing IEPs. Overall, this group of new special education teachers has minimal teaching skills, and they are employed in jobs for which they are not fully qualified. These mentees will remain in the survival mode the longest, often feeling that they are simply trying to make it through the school day. The same cautions of Mason and White (2001) apply to this group, as they will require the highest level of supports including emotional, instructional, and classroom. Given the diverse range of skills that the mentees without any educational training have, the mentor will need active listening skills to determine the most important areas to provide support.

First-year special education teachers without a background in education or knowledge of a specific content area will rely heavily upon the mentor's guidance to successfully complete their first year of teaching. Some mentees may not know where they need the most support, and, in this case, the mentor can use the checklist provided in Table 1.1 to pinpoint areas of low, moderate, and high need. All mentees can complete the mentee needs checklist independently or in consultation with their mentor. By completing the checklist

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 6

Table 1.1 Mentee needs checklist

Directions: Rate the mentee in each of the following areas to determine areas of support.

Mentee Needs Checklist			
Areas of Support to Consider:	**High Need**	**Moderate Need**	**Low Need**
1. Assessing student progress.			
2. Making accommodations or modifications for students.			
3. Lesson planning ☑: long- ☐ or short-term ☐ plans.			
4. Writing goals and objectives.			
5. Writing IEPs.			
6. Completing paperwork related to district procedures.			
7. Setting up the classroom environment.			
8. Creating classroom rules.			
9. Enforcing classroom rules.			
10. Managing classroom instructional time or downtime.			
11. Locating and using grade-level expectations or state standards.			
12. Obtaining and locating classroom materials.			
13. Understanding testing materials and procedures.			
14. Ideas for teaching specific lessons.			
15. Organizing student papers and records.			
16. Learning more about the subject matter.			
17. Motivating students.			
18. Working with paraprofessionals.			
19. Working with parents.			
20. Collaborating with general education teachers.			
Total			
Priority Areas to Link to Action Plan			
1.	2.		
3.	4.		

Copyright © 2005 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Mentoring New Special Education Teachers,* by Mary Lou Duffy and James Forgan. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 7

together, the mentor and mentee can discuss critical areas of need and identify common goals. When completing the checklist independently, the mentor and mentee should meet to compare their perceptions and negotiate any differences. The goal of using the mentee needs checklist is to clarify the mentor and mentee's perceived areas of need and link them to the action plan (discussed later in this chapter).

Mentors play an important role in supporting new special education teachers. These diverse teachers will vary in their levels of need, from the teachers who are simply learning the school district's paperwork to those teachers who struggle in all areas and are trying to make it from one day to the next. Although the mentees' needs do vary, there are common needs of all new special education teachers, which are discussed next.

WHAT NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS NEED

Each Group of Teachers Will Have Varying Needs. Teachers in special education are faced with countless responsibilities ranging from instructional responsibilities, such as differentiating lesson plans, to compliance issues, such as writing IEPs that exceed ten pages. In addition, special education teachers work with diverse groups of students with varying instructional and social needs. Given these many challenges, the new special education teacher needs support and guidance from an experienced special education mentor to learn the explicit as well as hidden curriculum, or unwritten rules of the school (Whitaker, 2000a).

Richard Lavoie (1994), a well-known expert on learning disabilities, discusses the hidden curriculum as it relates to children with learning disabilities in his video, *Learning Disabilities and Social Skills: Last One Picked . . . First One Picked On*. The hidden curriculum consists of the unwritten rules of the school or environment that are not explicitly stated, but that everyone knows and follows. These rules are ones that students with learning disabilities have the most difficulty learning. Likewise, new special education teachers may need their mentor to teach them the hidden curriculum of the school. Perhaps the new teacher needs to know that one of the physical education teachers is more receptive to having mainstreamed students with behavior disorders than the other, or that if student materials are needed, it is easier to get them from the teacher next door rather than from the secretary who has the key to the bookroom. Teaching the new teacher about the hidden curriculum is one of many ways the mentor can support his or her mentee.

Common Needs. There is an emerging body of research on the types of supports new special education teachers need. Whitaker (2000a) conducted focus groups with beginning special education teachers and identified that they need support in the following areas: emotional support, system information related to the school or district, system information related to special education, materials or resources, discipline, curriculum or instruction, interaction with others, and management. Of these eight areas, teachers in the focus groups identified emotional support and system information as the most valuable

Table 1.2 Ways to provide emotional support

1. Listen.
2. Don't interrupt until the mentee is done talking.
3. Reaffirm the things the mentee is doing well.
4. Use clarifying statements to confirm you are listening. For example, "Your frustration seems to be mainly with Marc and Yolanda's behavior."
5. Avoid judging the mentee's actions.
6. If asked, provide suggestions.

supports to new teachers. In addition, the results from an initial survey (White & Mason, 2001a) of new teachers and mentors revealed that the types of support new special education teachers valued most were emotional support, ideas for teaching specific lessons, help to reduce frustration, and help to obtain classroom materials. Each type of support is discussed in further detail.

Emotional Support

Providing emotional support is important for mentors to consider when working with mentees because teaching can be an isolating profession (Gordon, 1991; Whitaker, 2000a). Many first-year special education teachers feel isolated, especially those teaching in a self-contained service delivery model or working without a paraeducator. Having a mentor that provides emotional support can help reduce these feelings of isolation. Kristie, one of the new teachers in our program wrote, "Being able to talk with my mentor was like taking a daily dose of medicine. It calmed my nerves and allowed me to realize that I was not the only teacher to encounter these difficulties." As discussed in Chapter 4, providing emotional support is part of the "assist not assess" philosophy of being a mentor. Mentees are not always looking for answers to their difficulties, but are in search of a person who understands their experience. A beginning teacher who just finished the school day and experienced the worst student behavior she ever encountered does not necessarily want solutions. She is looking for the comfort of a teacher who has been through the same or a similar experience and knows what she's feeling. Table 1.2 summarizes ways to provide emotional support to mentees.

Ideas for Specific Lessons

A second way for mentors to support mentees is to give them ideas for teaching specific lessons, a type of curricular support. The pairing of the mentor and mentee is critical for the success of curricular support. Ideally, mentors and mentees should have similar teaching assignments (Whitaker, 2001), or the mentor must have prior experience working in the same service delivery model with the same types of students as the mentee (Whitaker, 2000b). Obviously a mentor with ten years of experience teaching students with moderate intellectual disabilities would not be helpful for providing

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 9

specific lesson ideas to a first-year teacher of students with learning disabilities. The first-year learning disabilities teacher should be paired with another teacher with the same experience or similar teaching assignment.

If the mentor does not have the same teaching assignment as the mentee, then he or she should be knowledgeable about resources to help provide specific ideas for the lesson. Perhaps the mentor or the mentoring program coordinator knows another learning disabilities teacher in a nearby school that the mentee could contact. The school district program specialist for learning disabilities may be a knowledgeable source for instructional ideas. The mentor may even refer the mentee to his or her favorite Internet site to locate specific ideas for teaching the lesson (White & Mason, 2001a) or suggest one of the Internet sites found in Table 1.3.

Another way to use technology to empower the mentee and provide specific ideas for lessons is to post the question about the instructional lesson on an Internet mentoring discussion board. The mentor and mentee can visit some of the Web sites listed in Table 1.4 that have interactive discussion boards. Discussion boards provide forums for discussion teaching ideas with individuals of diverse experiences from across the world. The mentees can read questions from other individuals as well as post their own questions about ideas for a lesson or instructional unit. Frequently checking the Web site for new responses becomes enjoyable and expands the mentee's professional network.

The mentor can also observe the mentee during instruction to gain ideas about the content they teach and to watch the way students interact independently and as a group. Direct observation of the students provides the mentor with information about group dynamics that influence his or her specific instructional recommendations. Some groups of students may not work well in cooperative groups, whereas others may. Based on the mentor's feedback, the special education teacher teaching the same instructional lesson to multiple groups of students can modify the lesson and teach it again to another group.

Time and scheduling constraints may make it difficult for the mentor and mentee to find time to do observations of each other. One solution may be to use videotaped teaching sessions as a springboard for discussions. The mentor can videotape him or herself teaching and share the tape with the mentee as part of a support activity. The mentor and mentee can review the tape together, and the mentor can "think aloud" about changes he or she would make. The mentees may feel uneasy taping themselves; however, the opportunity to watch yourself teach and reflect on how others view you is a powerful learning tool.

Additional curricular ideas for mentors are displayed in Table 1.5. Each of these ideas provides a launching point for helping the mentees respond to students' diverse curricular needs. Providing the mentee with specific curricular ideas for instruction can help reduce frustration.

Reducing Frustration

The mentee's first year of teaching is filled with many triumphs as well as frustrations (White & Mason, 2001a). There are several ways the mentor can support the mentee to reduce his or her common frustrations. For example, the mentor can help locate classroom materials, provide the needed paperwork and

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 10

Table 1.3 Online resources for lesson planning

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">Online Resources for Lessons</th></tr>
<tr><th></th><th>Elementary School</th><th>Middle School</th><th>High School</th><th>Comments</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Reading/ Literacy</td><td colspan="3">http://www.awesomelibrary.org/special-ed.html</td><td>Special education lesson plans for teachers</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">http://www.getreadytoread.org/skillE.cfm</td><td>N/A</td><td>Elementary and middle school reading lessons</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">http://www.interventioncentral.com</td><td>Provides detailed strategies to increase phonics skills, reading decoding, fluency, and comprehension</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Mathematics</td><td colspan="3">http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/places/lessons.html</td><td>Math plans for special and general education</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">http://www.teachnology.com/teachers/lesson_plans/</td><td>Lesson plans for math and all subjects</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Science</td><td colspan="3">http://k-6educators.about.com/cs/science/</td><td>Science lesson plans—searchable</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">http://www.lessonplanspage.com/Science.htm</td><td>Plans for all grades</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Social Studies</td><td colspan="3">http://www.teachers.net/cgi-bin/lessons/sort.cgi?searchterm=Social+Studies</td><td>Social studies ideas—all grades</td></tr>
<tr><td>N/A</td><td colspan="2">http://7-12educators.about.com/cs/socialstudies/</td><td>Plans for middle and high school</td></tr>
<tr><td>Resources in Spanish</td><td colspan="3">http://paidos.rediris.es/needirectorio/</td><td>Resources for teachers and parents</td></tr>
</table>

forms for notifying parents about IEP meetings, and assist with writing the IEP (White & Mason, 2001b). Additionally, many mentors provide their mentee with a contact list of people in the building or school district with their phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and role (see Table 1.6). Chris, a graduate of a teacher preparation program and a first-year special education teacher, was

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 11

Table 1.4 Internet mentoring discussion boards

Web Address	Site Description
http://www.dyslexia-teacher.com/t98.html	The Dyslexia Teacher Web site has a discussion board and resources on dyslexia
http://www.inspiringteachers.com/mentoring/boards.html	Beginning Teacher's Toolbox contains a discussion board
http://www.teachers.net/chat/	This is the teachers.net Web site, which contains a discussion board and resources for all teaching disciplines
http://www.epals.com/tools/forum/	ePALS has a discussion board related to technology use
http://www.coe.fau.edu/cspd/discussion/	Special education discussion board from a regional personnel development site

Table 1.5 Specific curriculum ideas

Curriculum Concerns: Ideas for Mentors
Share copies of your units and student projects.
Co-plan a lesson built around the general education curriculum standards.
Show the mentee how to make accommodations to a lesson.
Show the mentee how you identify a student's learning style.
Model successful teaching techniques in their classroom.
Show the mentee how to order specific curriculum materials you find useful.
Show the mentee how to design and set up instructional learning centers.

frustrated that he had four computers in his classroom, and only one worked. He explained, "The computer is such a powerful teaching tool, and to have them sitting like oversize paperweights was driving me up the wall. Thankfully my mentor knew the person to call that gets things done, and within two weeks the computers were up and running." If Chris had to track down the school district's systems support personnel, it would have taken him weeks because most of his planning period time was spent grading papers, contacting parents, and preparing for his next class. Although broken computers may not frustrate some teachers, Chris looked at the computer area several times a day and each time felt the frustration. His mentor helped reduce this frustration, which permitted Chris to focus on implementing the computer center.

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 3:59 PM Page 12

Table 1.6 Resource contact list

Resource Contact List			
Position	**Name**	**Phone Number**	**E-mail Address**
Principal			
Assistant Principal			
Guidance Counselor			
Secretary			
Bookkeeper			
Office Staff			
Speech Therapist			
Occupational Therapist			
Physical Therapist			
School Nurse			
Paraprofessional			
Head Custodian			
Cafeteria Food Staff			
Cafeteria Monitor			
Audio-Visual Contact			
Technology Specialist			
Staffing/Program Specialist			
District Special Education Director			
School Psychologist			
Crisis Counselor			
Social Worker			
Afterschool Program Coordinator			
Bus Driver			
Other			
Other			

SOURCE: Copyright © 2005 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Mentoring New Special Education Teachers: A Guide for Mentors and Program Developers,* by Mary Lou Duffy and James Forgan. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

Table 1.7 Surveying and solving frustrations

Copy this form and keep it on your desk. When you experience a frustration, write it down so that later you can later discuss it with your mentor.

Frustration	Potential Solution or Resource
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

SOURCE: Copyright © 2005 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Mentoring New Special Education Teachers: A Guide for Mentors and Program Developers,* by Mary Lou Duffy and James Forgan. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

New special education teachers will feel frustrated by a variety of things such as the amount of time it takes to copy materials, complete paperwork, or simply learn how to use the school's automated telephone system. One way to help the mentee identify and remember their frustrations is to use the Solving Frustrations Survey located in Table 1.7. Oftentimes the mentee becomes engrossed in an activity or instructional lesson and later forgets the frustrating circumstances. If the mentee writes a few words as a reminder about what occurred, he or she can later discuss solutions with a mentor.

Systems Support and Information Relating to the School or District

Initially, the mentor spends considerable time explaining school district paperwork, policies, and procedures to the mentee. New special education teachers quickly realize that each school district has different procedures for completing paperwork and complying with state and federal regulations. New special education teachers coming from another school district and recent graduates of teacher preparation programs understand special education vocabulary and have the knowledge to write IEPs. Mentors can provide this

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 14

Table 1.8 Paperwork scavenger hunt

Directions: Locate all required forms. Create a file or notebook section for each set of forms according to use (e.g., behavioral forms, parent notification forms, IEP forms, etc.).

Form Name*	Form Use	Form Number	Blank Form Location
Parent Notification of Meeting			
Consent for Evaluation			
Student Study Team Conference Notes			
IEP Forms			
Transition Planning Form			
Notification of Reevaluation			
Initial Placement Form			
Reevaluation Summary Form			
Functional Assessment Form			
Behavior Intervention Plan			
Interim Progress Reports			

*Form names will vary from district to district; these are sample form names.

Copyright © 2005 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted from *Mentoring New Special Education Teachers,* by Mary Lou Duffy and James Forgan. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. Reproduction authorized only for the local school site or nonprofit organization that has purchased this book.

group with additional knowledge of the specific policies and procedures of the school district. Mentors working with new special education teachers without any educational training will have to provide extensive knowledge of special education vocabulary, paperwork, and procedures. In a recent survey of special education mentors, weekly time commitments ranged from 15 minutes to 4 hours depending on the needs of the mentee (White & Mason, 2001a).

One of the most time-consuming tasks for mentors and mentees is completing necessary paperwork. To expedite the paperwork explanation process, the mentor and mentee can locate copies of all required school district paperwork using the paperwork scavenger hunt located in Table 1.8. By completing the paperwork scavenger hunt activity, the mentee can create a file or notebook with completed samples of all required paperwork. For example, the mentee can create files for parent notifications, referrals, IEPs, behavior intervention plans, and functional behavior assessments. The location of additional blank forms should be noted on the paperwork scavenger hunt so the mentee knows if he or she should look in the school office, on an Internet site, or in the district office.

As a collaborative activity, the mentor and mentee can complete a set of paperwork in each area based on a child in the classroom. Although this activity may be time-consuming, it provides the mentee with a guide for completing all forms using the required format. The mentee can refer to these forms all year as a model for paperwork completion. Ideally, a student requiring a new IEP or functional assessment of behavior is chosen to make the activity worthy of the time required for completion. The mentor could give the mentee copies of all of his or her completed forms; however, jointly completing the forms teaches, rather than only shows, the mentee what to do and enhances information retention. Sylvia Ostbye, a prekindergarten special education teacher explained:

> I provided Amy [her mentee] with many activities and ideas that I collected and tried over many years. I also tutored her on the writing of IEPs using the computer program currently being used by our county and I helped her write the first one. Amy caught on quickly and her IEPs were terrific.

With direct instruction from her mentor on writing an IEP for a student, Amy learned the district format and quickly became independent.

Additional ideas for mentors to use when acquainting the mentees to the school environment are located in Table 1.9. Although some of these ideas may appear commonsense, they are supported by research and help send a message of welcoming and belonging that can be comforting to a new special education teacher (Pardini, 2002). William, a new special education teacher commented,

> When Laura [the mentor] took me around to meet all the teachers and support staff, it made me feel valued and implied that I was a team member. I felt an instant belonging to the school family.

Table 1.9 School environment concerns

School Environment Concerns: Ideas for Mentors
Introduce the mentee to school faculty and staff.
Show the mentee how to locate needed materials.
Help the mentee learn the shortcuts of the building's physical design.
Explain supervisory tasks (e.g., bus duty, student pickup, hall monitor between classes).
Show the mentee how to request or make photocopies of materials.
Explain how to request a substitute teacher when the mentee is absent.
Explain the attitudes of other teachers.

If William's mentor had not personally introduced him to the faculty and staff, it could have taken him several weeks to individually meet everyone, and he may have felt professionally isolated. Often times the smallest gestures create the largest impact.

The specific supports of emotional support, specific curricular ideas, reducing frustrations, and systems support were identified by new special education teachers as the most important components for a successful first year of teaching (White & Mason, 2001a; Whitaker, 2000a). These supports represent variables new special education teacher found valuable. In addition to these, special education teachers also rate many other types of supports as valuable. Additional specific special education supports, such as instructional strategies, accommodations, and classroom management are discussed in Chapter 2.

SUPPORTS ESE MENTORS CAN PROVIDE MENTEES

As noted previously, there are numerous specific supports that mentors can provide mentees. However, these supports will vary depending on the individual needs of each mentee. Of primary importance for the mentor is prioritizing the mentee's most important needs. The mentor will need to assess the mentee's current level of functioning to identify any specific needs using an activity such as the one in Table 1.1. The mentee needs checklist can be completed independently or collaboratively, and after the mentee's primary needs are identified, they can be incorporated into an action plan. The action plan helps the mentee identify and make progress toward enhancing his or her teaching skills (see Resource A).

An action plan is not an evaluative instrument. It is a collaboratively designed document used for the benefit of the mentee and mentor to focus on common goals, define responsibilities, and chronicle the mentee's professional progress. Additionally, the action plan is a working document that is revised and modified as needed. The mentor and mentee should review the action plan monthly. The primary components of the action plan are (a) identifying goals, (b) identifying objectives, (c) creating specific steps to accomplish the objectives, and (d) evaluating the outcome and using the information learned. Although each component is discussed individually for the purpose of discussion, each component is interrelated.

The initial step of the action plan is to identify goals the mentee wants to accomplish. The action plan in Resource A contains space to write up to four goals. The goals may relate to the mentee's curricular, behavioral, personal, or other needs. Perhaps the mentee desires to increase the average math score of his students, decrease the number of times students call out for assistance, or learn how to reduce the amount of time required for grading student work. Some goals selected by the mentor and mentee may address the overwhelming amount of paperwork associated with being a special education teacher. They may want to look for ways to streamline administrative activities for a new teacher. Similar to writing annual goals on a student's IEP, goals on the mentor-mentee action plan should be linked to assessment and based on need. When

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 17

the pair select the goals for the year, they must keep in mind that some goals escalate teacher performance pressure, and some serve to de-escalate the pressure. The math curriculum workshop may be necessary, but putting it off until the summer may de-escalate pressure on the new teacher. The mentor's judgment will be essential in determining the priority of the goals.

As mentioned previously, the Mentee Needs Checklist, Table 1.1, is one technique the mentee and mentor may collaboratively use to identify needs. Other suggestions for identifying the mentee's primary needs are using an informal discussion and answering the question, What aspect of my teaching do I want to improve? The assessment can also be based on needs identified by the mentor while observing the mentee's classroom teaching. Remember that whichever technique is used to identify the goal(s), the goal(s) must be valued as important by the mentee. It is not sufficient for the mentor to identify a goal as important and list it on the action plan without the mentee holding the same belief. The mentee must recognize the goal as valuable to expend effort accomplishing it.

Once the goal is identified, the second component is writing objectives in measurable terms to adequately measure progress. The example completed action in Resource A refers to the second component as the "What." The "What" component is a statement of what the mentee wants to accomplish. For example, the objective "The mentee will increase the use of specific academic praise" is not written specifically enough to document progress. However, the objective is measurable when stated, "The mentee will increase the use of specific academic praise to a minimum of ten times during a one-hour lesson." Measurable goals and objectives facilitate the documentation of progress and are more useful to the mentee and mentor.

The third step of the action plan is the "So What" component. This component contains information regarding specific steps the mentee will take to accomplish his or her objectives. The mentee may ask him or herself, "So what action must I take to accomplish this objective?" If the mentee's goal is to increase the use of specific academic praise to a minimum of ten times during a one-hour lesson, the mentee and mentor may brainstorm a list of potential solutions. Example solutions to this objective may include (a) posting a visual cue in the classroom, (b) setting a timer to sound every ten minutes, and (c) audiotaping a lesson and replaying it after school to count the number of specific academic praises. From the list, the mentee and mentor may decide what the first action is, posting a visual cue in the classroom followed by audiotaping a lesson.

The "So What" actions may be responsibilities of the mentee, mentor, or other individual. In the aforementioned specific academic praise example, the mentee completed all actions. If the mentee's second objective was related to a student's behavioral need, the mentee and mentor may both take action. For example, the mentee's second objective is to reduce the number of verbal outbursts from a student from five to one per day. The mentee and mentor may decide to work together to accomplish this objective. Upon the mentee identifying the student's signs of frustration, such as wrinkling his brow, clutching his fists, and having deep sighs, she will ask the student to deliver a note to the mentor's classroom. This activity diffuses the student's frustration and permits

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 18

him to regain his focus. At the same time, it allows the mentee to achieve her objective of decreasing the student's verbal outbursts to no more than one per day.

The last component of the action plan is to evaluate and reflect on the outcome. This component is termed "Now What?" During this component, the mentee and mentor examine the data and ask the question, Now that we have the data, what should we do? Various answers come to mind when this question is posed. Assuming the mentee is now providing at least ten specific academic praises each hour, he may decide to remove the visual cue from the classroom. Perhaps the mentee will decide to monitor his specific academic praise in another class or with another group of students to see if his behavior generalizes to new environments. During this component, the mentee and mentor have the ability to reflect on what went well and discuss any future changes. Of course if the outcome documents successful completion of the objective and goal, the mentee may decide to focus on a new goal. If the outcome does not meet expectations, the mentee will likely refine the action steps or decide to try a new activity.

Overall, the action plan helps provide support and a central focus for chronicling the mentee's professional growth. Ultimately it is up to the mentoring pair to recognize the value of an action plan because the plan becomes as useful and valuable as the mentee and mentor desire. Clearly the action plan has no value if it is created but remains filed. On the other hand, if the action plan becomes a central conversational component for the mentor and mentee to use as a reflection tool, the action plan becomes pivotal. By having an action plan, the new special education teacher feels supported and many of his or her fears and anxieties subside.

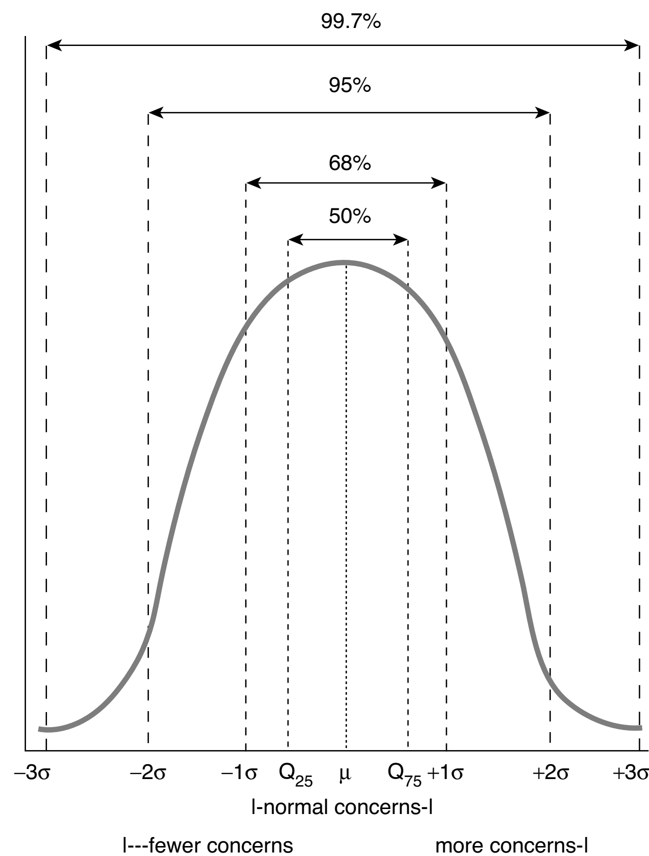
Note of caution: Do not let this action plan become an evaluation instrument for the administration. This is between the mentor and mentee alone. It should not be factored into the annual evaluation, merit pay, or annual assessment of the new teacher.

FEARS AND ANXIETIES OF NEW TEACHERS

All new special education teachers have concerns associated with their first year of teaching. Like most human behaviors, new teachers' fears and anxieties can be represented by a bell-shaped curve such as the normal distribution curve. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, about 68% of new special education teachers have relatively the same level of anxiety: the middle section of the normal distribution curve. Approximately another 15% of teachers experience little anxiety and have above-average confidence in their teaching abilities: the far right side of the curve. The final 15% of teachers will feel less confident about their abilities and experience higher than normal levels of anxiety: represented by the far left side of the curve. Although there are varying degrees of concerns that new special education teachers experience, the issues which cause anxiety are similar. The most common fears and anxieties of new special education teachers' experience include issues such as time management, workload, instruction, collaboration, accountability, motivating students, and

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 19

Figure 1.1 Anxiety levels of new special education teachers



professional isolation (White & Mason, 2001a; Wilson, Ireton, & Wood, 1997; Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

This graph shows the percentage of teacher concerns and fears as represented by a bell-shaped curve.

Researchers from the Council for Exceptional Children's Mentoring Induction Project (White & Mason, 2001) identified the most urgent concerns of new teachers as time management, workload, providing instruction, and collaborating with general educators and parents. Additional areas of concern for new teachers also include technology, accountability, cultural awareness, motivation of students, and isolation. The mentor has a critical role working to support the mentee in each of these areas. Given the high level of importance to successful teacher induction, each area is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE

Up to this point, the narrative has primarily focused on ways mentors can support the mentee. The school principal or school administrator is another valuable support for the mentee (Boyer & Lee, 2001). New special education teachers feel increased emotional support and less social and professional

isolation with a supportive administrator (Bridges to Success, 2003). By supporting the special education teacher, the school administrator sends the message that they have a vested interest in the teacher and concern for their success. Additionally, administrators value that supporting new special education teachers promotes teacher retention and creates less teacher turnover in their schools. Teachers feel disconnected from the school climate without administrator support. A lack of administrator support is one frequently cited reason new special education teachers leave the classroom (Bridges to Success, 2003; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999).

In addition to supporting the new special education teacher, the school administrator has a substantial influence on the role and assignment of the mentee (Boyer & Lee, 2001) as well as the formal evaluation of the mentee's teaching performance. The building administrator has the responsibility of formally documenting the mentee's teaching performance. As recommended by White and Mason (2001b) in their Council for Exceptional Children Mentoring Induction Project, mentors should not be placed in a position to formally evaluate their mentees. Lloyd, Wood, & Moreno (2000) also recommend that the mentor is a facilitator, not an evaluator. If the mentor is placed in the role of evaluator, it dramatically changes the mentor-mentee relationship from supportive to supervisory. No longer is the mentor viewed as a confidant, but rather as a performance evaluator. If the mentor is asked to provide evaluative data on the mentee, regardless whether the mentee is doing well or poor, he or she should politely decline the request by citing that such a disclosure is not in the best interest of the mentee or mentor. Providing evaluative data about the mentee sabotages the mentor's efforts to develop and maintain a collegial relationship with his or her mentee.

ASSIGNMENT OF NEW TEACHERS

There are two types of assignments related to new special education teachers that have important implications for a successful year. The first assignment is the new teacher's teaching assignment made by the school administrator. Second is the assignment of the mentor to the mentee, another decision typically made by the school administrator.

Teacher Assignment

For better or worse, most experienced teachers remember their first year of teaching. The first year of teaching is one that typically contains numerous trials and tribulations as new teachers learn the ins and outs of their profession. Of particular importance during the first year of teaching is the teaching assignment (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003). The beginning special education teacher's assignment can either make or break his or her first year of teaching. Fortunately, most new teachers receive fair teaching assignments during their first year; some do not. Some new special education teachers will be

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 21

assigned to classrooms without adequate furniture, materials, space, or supplies. Other teachers will have a roster of students with a history of being problematic or get assigned the largest roster of students.

As the new special education teacher, and a male, Lorenzo's principal felt he would be able to handle the boys with behavior disorders, so he assigned all five to his cross-categorical elementary classroom. At the end of his first year of teaching, Lorenzo commented, "This [assignment] was unfair. Because I was the new teacher, I was stuck with the students with the lowest academics and most challenging behaviors."

More challenging assignments, like Lorenzo's, may leave many new teachers feeling apprehensive and questioning their preparedness during the first weeks of the school year. Unfortunately, Lorenzo's situation happens to many new special education teachers who receive the most challenging students and often the least amount of materials. According to Carl D. Glickman, "In most professions, the challenge of the job increases over time as one acquires experience and expertise. In teaching, we've had it reversed. Typically, the most challenging situation a teacher experienced was in his or her first year" (Glickman, quoted in Whitaker, 2001). With careful consideration, the school administrator can help ensure that all teachers' assignments reflect equity in the student distribution and the availability of classroom materials.

School administrators have the crucial role of ensuring that the new special education teacher does not complete his or her first year of teaching under the unfavorable conditions as previously noted. Teaching in an unsupportive environment during the first year may cause the new special education teacher to question his or her teaching skills as well as contemplate leaving the profession (Whitaker, 2001). New special education teachers, depending on their background, will question their skills in different areas such as planning instruction, meeting diverse needs of students, managing student behavior, or working with other professionals. One way the school administrator can help support and retain new special education teachers is to provide a wonderful assignment and favorable teaching conditions. A second way the school administrator can retain new special education teachers is to assign an effective mentor.

Mentor Assignment

The mentor is typically selected from the best of the profession. The "teacher of teachers" is who we all strive to be like. They are widely acknowledged as being good at their job or skilled professionals. This can set up a difficult situation for principals or those who determine the teachers' schedules and responsibilities. Should the best teachers be assigned additional duties that take away from their greatest skills? Many times the best teachers and managers are given difficult students with which to work because the administration knows they can do the job. An administrator has to consider the amount of attention a new teacher may demand from a mentor. In considering the task demands of mentoring, the administrator may assign the mentor to a lightened teaching schedule, or a schedule that allows for some flexibility in timing (i.e., the

mentor and mentee have a shared planning time). The assignment of the new special education teacher to a mentor is one important decision that impacts every area of the mentoring relationship. In a review of studies on new teacher induction in special education, Griffin et al. (2003) confirm that both mentors and mentees should be special educators. In their study on mentoring support, Lloyd et al. (2000) also note that the principal is the individual primarily responsible for the selection of mentors. Ideally, the school principal should consult with the mentor teacher before making an assignment to assess his or her willingness to mentor as well as their perceived "fit" with the mentee. If the principal's school district works with any universities to implement new teacher induction mentoring programs, the principal may utilize them as a resource for selecting a mentor because the mentor does not have to teach at the same school as the mentee. Preferably, the mentor and mentee would both teach students of similar disabilities and be in the same school. In special education this does not always occur, and often there are only one or two special education teachers in the entire school: one for mild disabilities and one for moderate and severe disabilities. Whitaker (2000b) recommends that the first priority in selecting a mentor should be to pair a mentor and mentee who teach students with similar disabilities. When this is not possible, she recommends a co-mentoring arrangement wherein the mentee has two mentor teachers: one in the building to provide emotional support, socialization into the school culture, etc.; and one mentor who can mentor the special education issues of teaching. The mentor in the same school as the mentee can provide unscheduled meetings, the most frequently experienced form of support (Whitaker, 2000b). The mentor and mentee in different schools can use scheduled or unscheduled times to communicate by utilizing technologies such as e-mail, Internet video cameras, and the telephone. These technologies can assist the mentor and mentee in communicating when the need arises. Whitaker reports that mentor teachers reported scheduled meetings second in support and effectiveness in meeting the mentee's needs.

To assess the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, the principal should regularly obtain feedback from the mentor and mentee. When the mentor and mentee roles are clearly defined (see Chapter 3 for roles of both the mentor and the mentee), assessing the relationship becomes clearer for the building administrator. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities remove any ambiguity from tasks the mentor and mentee should accomplish. If the administrator, mentee, or mentor feel the relationship is not beneficial, opportunities for change and making another assignment should be permitted. Table 1.10 provides administrators with specific ideas for supporting the mentee.

School administrators should keep in mind that some new teachers are hesitant to admit that they lack the materials or resources with which to teach because they worry it will make them look unprepared. Some mentees believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness. By being aware of these needs, the school administrator takes a proactive approach toward supporting new special education teachers before any problematic issues arise. Additional supports for beginning special education teachers are discussed in Chapter 2.

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 23

Table 1.10 Administrator support for the new special education teacher

	Administrator Suggestions for Helping New Special Education Teachers
1.	Carefully contemplate the mentor-mentee match.
2.	Network out of your own school to locate mentor teachers by contacting other principals or the school district special education director.
3.	Assign the new special education teacher a room in the building, not a portable.
4.	Provide funding for the new teacher to purchase supplies.
5.	Ensure enough books and supplies were ordered for the new special education teacher.
6.	Check with the new teacher during the first few days of school to see if the teacher has supplies: copies of teacher's manuals, curriculum guides (including those for the general education curriculum).
7.	Provide adequate paraprofessional support.
8.	Create a supportive climate such as having an open-door office policy.
9.	Follow through with consistent disciplining of students.
10.	Allow shared decision making by the new teacher and school staff.
11.	Provide release time so the new special education teacher can observe other teachers, meet with his or her mentor, and attend professional development trainings.
12.	Establish a close working relationship by observing without forms and attending IEP meetings with the new special education teacher.
13.	Reduce the mentee and mentor noninstructional responsibilities such as bus or cafeteria duty and committee membership.
14.	Participate in evaluating the mentoring program and making improvements.
15.	Set up a schedule for conducting formal observations of the mentee.
16.	After the observation, provide clear feedback and specific suggestions to the new special education teacher.
17.	Continually share information targeted to new special education teachers.

WHAT IF?

The newest special education teacher in your school is a "real go-getter." She is an active participant at faculty meetings, participates in the faculty discussions, and seems to have it all together. The tradition at your school is to match new teachers with a mentor. In your role as program administrator, you talked with

01-Duffy.qxd 10/26/2004 12:46 PM Page 24

the new teacher about the mentoring program. She told you she didn't need a mentor. What do you do?

Possible Solutions Include

Assign a mentor to work with the new teacher anyway, but talk with both the mentor and mentee explaining that the mentor is available to the mentee to help with all sorts of school issues. The mentor is there to help whenever the mentee needs him or her. Who knows, the mentee may need information further into the school year, and the mentor would be an excellent resource for issues beyond special education.

Internet Sites on Mentoring

- Teacher.Net Mentor Center: http://teachers.net/mentors/
- Teacher Mentoring: www.coled.mankato.msus.edu/dept/labdist/mentor/
- ASCD Mentoring Resources: www.mentors.net
- Best Practices in Mentoring: www.teachermentors.com
- Bridges to Success Special Education Teacher Induction: www.tr.wou. edu
- Council for Exceptional Children Mentoring Induction Principles and Guidelines: www.cec.sped.org/spotlight/udl/mip_g_manual_11pt.pdf

REFERENCES

Boyer, L., & Lee, C. (2001). Converting challenge to success: Supporting a new teacher of students with autism. *Journal of Special Education, 35*(2), 75–83.

Bridges to Success. (2003). Guidelines for special education administrator support. Retrieved May 6, 2003, from http://www.tr.wou.edu/bridges2/sped_support.htm

Council for Exceptional Children. (2001). *Bright futures for exceptional learners.* Reston, VA: Author.

Feiman-Nesmer, S. (1996). *Teacher mentoring: A critical review.* (Report No. EDO-SP-95–2). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED397060).

Gordon, S. P. (1991). *How to help beginning teachers succeed.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

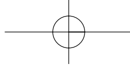
Griffin, C. C., Winn, J. A., Otis-Wilborn, A., & Kilgore, K. L. (2003). *New teacher induction in special education.* Retrieved August 6, 2003, from www.coe.ufl.edu/coppse/

Lavoie, R. D. (1994). *Learning disabilities and social skills: Last one picked . . . first one picked on.* Washington, DC: WETA PBS Video.

Lloyd, S. R., Wood, T. A., & Moreno, G. (2000). What's a mentor to do? *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(1), 38–42.

Mason, C., & White, M. (2001). The mentoring induction project: Supporting new teachers—hints for mentors and mentoring coordinators. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 34*(1), 80–81.

Miller, M. D., Brownell, M. T., & Smith, S. W. (1999). Factors that predict teachers staying in, leaving, or transferring from the special education classroom. *Exceptional Children, 65*(2), 201–218.



Pardini, P. (2002). Stitching new teachers into the school's fabric. *Journal of Staff Development, 23*(3), 23–26.

U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *No Child Left Behind.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml#

Whitaker, S. D. (2000a). What do first-year special education teachers need? *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(1), 28–36.

Whitaker, S. D. (2000b). Mentoring beginning special education teachers and the relationship to attrition. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 546–566.

Whitaker, S. D. (2001). Supporting beginning special education teachers. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 34*(4), 1–18.

White, M., & Mason, C. (2001a). New teacher supports. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(3), 91.

White, M., & Mason, C. (2001b). The mentoring induction project: What new teachers need from mentors. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(6), 81.

Wilson, B., Ireton, J., & Wood, J. A. (1997). Beginning teacher fears. *Education, 117*(3), 396–400.

Zabel, R. H., & Zabel, M. K. (2001). Revisiting burnout among special education teachers: Do age, experience, and preparation still matter? *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(2), 128–139.