



HERE WE GO

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DON'T JUST PREPARE NEW TEACHERS, NURTURE THEM

Teaching is not just a tough job; it's a complex one that demands ongoing learning, constant recalibration, and flexibility that would stun a gymnast.

Throughout the production of this issue, I have heard outstanding educators lament their first years of teaching. Pointing to their past shortcomings, they blame themselves, saying things like: “I had no idea what I was doing,” “My students deserved better,” or “I wish I could go back and apologize to those students.” One coach said she connects with former students on social media for the express purpose of apologizing.

What's often missing in these stories is the role of the systems that let those new teachers down — and, by extension, let students down. Teaching is not just a tough job; it's a complex one that demands ongoing learning, constant recalibration, and flexibility that would stun a gymnast. Teaching isn't something a person can do perfectly on Day One. And it isn't something a person can do in isolation.

Yet, too often, new teachers are expected to go it alone. After a week of new teacher induction, many are marooned in their classrooms, save for an occasional meeting or a check-in from a buddy teacher. They're left to stew in a soup of questions, wondering whom to ask for advice on which topic.

We know this isn't the best way for new teachers to learn. It isn't how other professionals are expected to grow into their roles. Doctors start as residents, meeting regularly with attending physicians to review their cases. Even after those first years, they engage in frequent clinical rounds to get advice and input. Teachers rarely have that kind of early and ongoing support. And yet they, too, are expected to save lives, sometimes quite literally.

This issue of *The Learning Professional* is grounded in Learning Forward's belief that now is the time to change this pattern and make meaningful, ongoing support for new teachers the norm.

Schools are struggling with teacher shortages and scrambling to hire as many new teachers as they can. Many of those teachers are coming through alternative pathways that provide varying levels of practice and pedagogical support. At the same time, teachers are grappling with students' growing needs and crises brought on by the world outside the school doors.

These trends create major challenges — but also an opportunity to create a systemic approach that ensures every new teacher is encircled by a web of support to become the best educator possible.

As authors in this issue point out, new teacher support should be the beginning of a career-long continuum of professional learning that is grounded in Standards for Professional Learning. Achieving equity and excellence for every student doesn't happen because of a single week at the end of the summer before classes start. Nor does it happen because of one solitary year of job-embedded support.

But high-quality mentoring and induction programs can be the start of years of learning and growth. They can foster habits of collaboration, inquiry, and reflection and help build a culture that honors and expects professional learning and growth. And early career support from peers and colleagues can be cornerstones in an approach to long-term teacher retention.

The theme of this issue is called “nurturing new teachers” for a reason: New teachers don't just need information or modeling of best instructional practices. They need to be welcomed into the profession and honored for who they are and what they bring. They need to be guided and buoyed as they navigate the stresses of teaching today, which include but are not limited to social, emotional, and academic recovery from COVID-19 and political and social divides about what is taught in the classroom and how. They need to be valued and cared for as the people who will journey with our children through tumultuous times and help address the world's challenges, a little bit at a time. ■

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