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Supporting New Teachers on the Road of Teaching: The Role of the Elementary School Principal

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A teaching career is analogous to driving a long road. On that road, school principals function as roadside assistance dispatchers who develop and facilitate supports for teachers navigating new careers. New teachers have prepared for the journey with preservice university education, which includes pedagogical knowledge and some student teaching experience. Despite this preparation, however, the journey can include unanticipated obstacles and detours, such as high performance standards from stakeholders who expect new teachers to navigate the journey with the same competency as veteran educators (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). As new teacher-drivers will maneuver the road conditions with different levels of expertise, principals have the experience and available resources required to support these novice educators as they begin their journeys.

In 2016, we conducted a qualitative research study that sought to understand how elementary principals support new teachers (Gonyou-Brown, 2016). In this chapter, we have interwoven the principals' interview responses and perceptions with research from the existing literature to present our findings. The study was comprised of semi-structured interviews with 12 elementary school principal participants (seven female and five male, with an average of nine years of experience) from Southern Ontario who developed and facilitated supports for new teachers in their schools. The interviews averaged 50 minutes in length, plus two interviews lasting approximately 25 minutes; the

study used data from these interviews. Participants shared observations and strategies gleaned from years of professional practice; specifically, they discussed their prior experience supporting new teachers and the strategies they employed to do this work. Many principals also shared the impact of their own early teaching experiences on their development and facilitation of new teacher supports.

To begin, this chapter addresses the expectations around how principals support new teachers within the Ontario context. Next, we discuss how principals understand new teacher supports and their role as resource facilitators; we then use these understandings to contextualize and review the strategies these principals employ. Third, we examine the challenges principals face when developing and facilitating supports for new teachers. Lastly, this chapter concludes by addressing the positive influence that principals can have when supporting new teachers and considering other potential supports that can help all new teachers successfully merge into their careers.

The Road for New Teachers in Ontario

To begin a merge onto the teaching road in Ontario, all teachers are required to possess, at minimum, an undergraduate university degree and a Bachelor of Education qualification from a recognized university (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016b). After completing a teaching degree and gaining certification through the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)—the governing body of teachers in the province—teachers are able to complete additional, specialist teaching qualifications through accredited universities. To qualify for this additional training, they must possess a strong knowledge base in the subject area and have at least two years of successful teaching experience, including at least one year of teaching in the specialist subject area in Ontario (Ontario College of

Teachers, 2016a). Principals in Ontario typically begin as experienced teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, certification in at least three divisions (primary, junior, intermediate, and/or senior), and two specialist qualifications, or a Master's degree (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Principals are also required to complete the Ontario Principal's Qualification Program (PQP), which is designed to provide teachers with the background and skills required to become school administrators (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Principals are also members of the OCT.

The educational job market in Ontario has changed in recent years. New teachers now find themselves entering a teacher-supply-surplus environment: There are now more available qualified teachers than there are teaching positions (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016c). New hiring practices are also now in place with Ontario's *Regulation 274/12* (also known as Reg. 274). Reg. 274 requires school boards to establish and maintain two *occasional teacher* lists: a roster of occasional (short-term) teachers and a long-term occasional (LTO) list. The two lists are seniority-based, with new teachers requiring a minimum of 10 months of occasional teaching with a minimum of 20 days teaching prior to applying to the district's LTO list (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario [EFTO], 2013). The combination of the teacher-surplus situation and the extended hiring process guidelines of Reg. 274 have resulted in new teachers often waiting years before gaining long-term and/or permanent employment in Ontario.

In Ontario schools, principals are expected to offer educational supports to novice teachers entering the practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Principals develop and facilitate, rather than directly implement, these supports. The principals in our study discussed developing these supports by building professional relationships and rapport

with new teachers. The supports evolve based on the resources the principals have available to them as school and district leaders. The participants also discussed the unique perspective they have when developing new teacher supports, as they can draw upon their own years of teaching experience. Further, principals often have previously served as experienced teacher mentors. Scholars have found these experiences can lead to the increased likelihood that principals will value open communication, and use it to build trusting relationships. (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Educational scholars also recognize that principals, by facilitating new teacher supports, are essential in welcoming new teachers into the practice (Hope, 1999; Jorissen, 2002; Protheroe, 2006; Roberson & Roberson, 2008). Principals can consider the resources available and effectively oversee the assistance provided to teachers in need.

Role of the School Principal in the Journey of New Teachers

Principals have unique insight into the experiences of new teachers. How principals understand the new teacher journey influences the ways they develop and facilitate different supports. Our study organized principals' understandings of new teacher supports into three themes (work, support, and policy) and identified connections between the concepts.

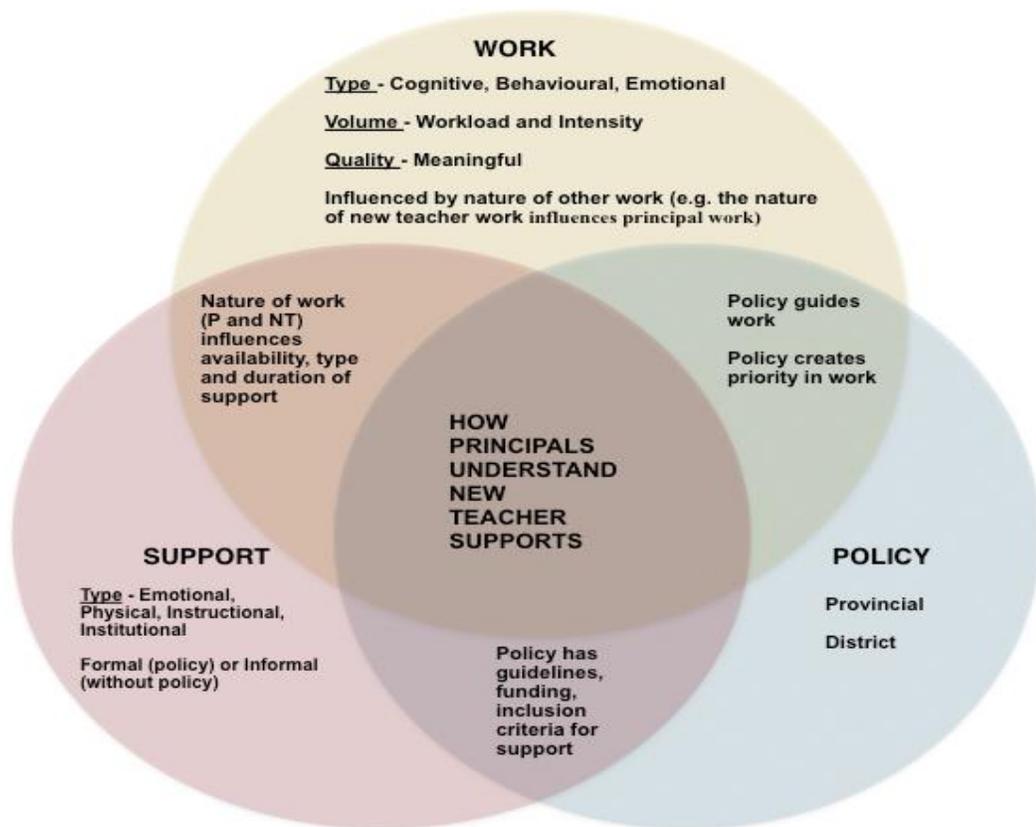


Figure 1: Principals’ Understanding of New Teacher Supports

Principals’ Understandings of New Teacher Supports

Work. Principals’ work is comprised of many responsibilities. A typical principal works with students, teachers, and other educational stakeholders, including school district personnel, families, and the school community.

According to the principals interviewed in our study, the volume and intensity of their workload influences how they support new teachers. Principals' work has been continually increasing and intensifying; it now commonly extends beyond the usual workday into the hours before and after school (Alberta Teachers' Association & Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Leithwood & Azah, 2014; Pollock, 2014). Specifically, technology has extended principals' workdays and increased expectations of their availability (Haughey, 2006; Petrecca, 2013; Pollock, 2014). While principals' work is intense, they still consider supporting new teachers to be a meaningful component of the job.

Due to the highly personal nature of work, scholars have found that it can provide meaning and purpose in life (Jackson, 2010; Krahn, Hughes, & Lowe, 2015; Mindzak, 2016). Research has also shown that meaning in principals' work emerges from two intrinsic sources: comprehension and intention (Brief & Nord, 1990; Morin, 2008). Scholars have linked the individual connection between meaning and work (or work environment) with a sense of personal identity (Pratt & Ashford, 2003). Principals derive meaning from providing new teacher supports and this meaning impacts their work.

The length and type of new teacher work also informs how principals develop supports. In Ontario, most new teachers will be engaged in a variety of short-term or daily teaching work prior to gaining long-term employment. Short- and long-term teachers have different types of work arrangements: short-term teachers work with other teachers' planning and assessment models and frequently move between classes and schools, whereas long-term teachers develop effective programming and assessment with consistent teaching assignments (Chalikakis, 2012). These different arrangements (daily,

short-term, or long-term) influence how principals understand their role in developing and facilitating different supports.

Support. In terms of categorization, Lipton and Wellman (2003) have identified four distinct types of support that principals provide to new teachers: emotional, physical, instructional, and institutional (p. 2). *Emotional supports* target the isolation (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) and range of emotions that new educators can experience as they enter the practice (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). The range of learning needs that new teachers encounter may result in a phenomenon called “praxis shock,” as new educators discover how the realities of the work challenge their previous beliefs and ideas about teaching (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). *Physical supports* include classroom setup and providing teaching resources such as art supplies and physical education equipment (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). *Instructional supports* include content-area resources and practical professional suggestions that are specific to new teacher work arrangements (Lipton & Wellman, 2003). Further, *institutional supports* include information shared with new teachers; this information is based on work expectations and rooted in policies and procedures within the school and school district (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).

The type of supports that principals offer may be formal in nature and/or guided by policy, or informal. Informal supports may have similar characteristics to formal supports, but are not outlined in a policy or program and do not have corresponding available funding.

Policy. Principals must be aware of the policies related to new teacher supports. Scholars have described policy as a normative notion that expresses both an ends and means to steer the actions and behaviours of people (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The access

that school principals have to available funding and resources for new teachers is designed to support policy. Accordingly, these policies inform principals' approaches toward the development and facilitation of new teacher supports.

In Ontario, the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) is a program of professional learning supports. This policy-sanctioned program is outlined and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education and managed by school districts. The program provides guidelines and funding that outline specific roles and offer resources, such as experienced teacher mentoring, Teacher Performance Appraisals (TPA), and work-specific professional development sessions. New teachers qualify for NTIP with a new teaching contract (permanent) position, or their first long-term occasional teaching position of 97 consecutive teaching days or longer.

Many new teachers, however, work in daily or short-term teaching assignments, following other teachers' plans and working in a range of classrooms. Notably, the inclusion criteria of NTIP does not include teachers first entering the profession in Ontario. Ontario's Reg. 274 indicates that an occasional teacher may only apply to be placed on a long-term occasional (LTO) teaching list once they have taught at least 20 days during the previous school year (EFTO, 2013). The regulation further stipulates that only occasional teachers on the LTO list who have completed a minimum of one LTO assignment of at least four months, and have the required qualifications and highest seniority ranking, can be considered for permanent positions. Prior to Reg. 274, school districts did not rank occasional teachers by seniority and new teachers applying for positions did not have to complete a minimum number of days in order to apply for long-term or contract teaching positions. The extended hiring process of Reg. 274 has resulted

in most newly hired teachers spending years in daily and short-term occasional teaching work prior to gaining long-term teaching employment and qualifying for NTIP supports.

Roadside Assistance for New Drivers

Similar to drivers having the potential to experience a broad range of vehicle issues on their journey, according to the principals in our study, the support needs of new teachers are complex and multifaceted. In their preservice education experience, the new teachers could demonstrate and practice professional skills with regular and predictable conditions. However, these teachers will encounter unknown conditions or challenges as they enter professional practice. The responsibilities of new teachers range from planning lessons that meet a diverse range of student learning needs, developing rapport with students, building lines of communication with families, developing effective assessment and reporting, conducting work according to school district expectations, and meeting professional practice guidelines. The participants also considered these professional learning needs to be linked with the duration and type of teaching assignments (short- or long-term, teaching one class or covering multiple classes and/or teaching subjects). Considering the many factors that make teaching a complex profession, every teacher has unique and individualized support needs.

Beginning a career in teaching can be lonely. The principals in our study expressed concerns, confirmed in the existing research, that many new teachers may experience a range of emotions in the first few years of teaching, including feeling overwhelmed, isolated, inadequate, or feeling unaware that others experience similar problems or challenges (Brock & Grady, 1998; Camp & Heath-Camp, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1994). Given their previous teaching experience, Ontario principals are able to

relate to new teachers and recall the obstacles and challenges of their own early years. Upon entering the practice, many new educators discover they have learning needs they had not anticipated (Rust, 1994; Wong & Wong, 2009). One principal expressed feeling isolation in an early teaching experience: “Having been one myself, a brand new teacher, entering that classroom with a piece of chalk in the room and nothing else, you don’t know where to go for support, even when it comes to actual resources in the classroom.” While new teachers may not realize the value of having available supports, principals understand that there will be challenges ahead. Several of the principals expressed empathy for the plight of new teachers first encountering the complexities of professional teaching practice; all of the principals in our study agreed that a successful entry into the teaching profession is critical to a teacher’s career and that providing support to new teachers is “one of the most important things that [principals] do.” As such, effective and appropriate principal-developed supports can help new teachers succeed in the classroom (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

Dispatching the Most Effective and Appropriate Supports

Comparable to roadside assistance dispatchers, principals develop and facilitate, rather than directly implement, supports. Principals assess the support needs and learning goals of new teachers, consider the resources available, and connect timely and efficient assistance. In our study, the principals identified themselves as *support facilitators* and discussed using their professional networks and capacities to engage the most appropriate supports for new teachers. Specifically, the principals identified engagement in collaborative school culture as a key support strategy. According to the participants, building relationships and learning with colleagues on the job offers productive, high-

engagement, and practical learning opportunities for new teachers. The principals also identified conferencing, coshadowing, and coteaching with experienced educators as beneficial learning strategies that can only be acquired on the job (Gold, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ganser, 2002; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). One principal discussed the value of new teachers working with experienced teacher mentors, emphasizing that: “[new teachers] need to see somebody doing it,” and having someone “coming in and [seeing and discussing] teaching is really critical for [new teachers] to get to that understanding.” Several other principals in the study discussed their belief that time out of the classroom had rendered them less current on pedagogical practices. For example, one principal shared: “I’ve been out of the classroom for 20 years now. I’m not the best person for [new teachers] to talk to about instructional approaches.” However, while the interviewed principals did not see themselves as directly supporting new teachers, they did identify their significant amount of influence over the establishment of the school climate and culture (Cherian & Daniel, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2007; Hope, 1999; Richards, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). In our study, the principals identified engaging different individuals within the school to offer direct support to new teachers—including experienced teachers, instructional coaches, and learning co-ordinators—and working within school-based networks as key strategies they could employ within a collaborative school culture to indirectly support new teachers entering the profession.

Challenges in Supporting New Drivers

As new drivers may hesitate to call a roadside assistance dispatcher, for the principals in our study, the supervisory nature of their position creates challenges when developing the open and trusting relationships they view as integral to supporting new

teachers. One principal shared, “I remember being in those first couple of years [of teaching] and you could hear the principal coming down the hall or walking in the room and it brought up anxiety. I understand that anxiety.” The principals expressed the value of building relationships with the new teachers in their school, but felt they lack the time and opportunity to develop relationships with beginning teachers that only work at their school intermittently.

The principals in our study also viewed their workload requirements as limiting the time they have available to meet with and build professional relationships with new teachers, especially those with short-term work arrangements. One principal shared, “I would love to be able to be out in the classroom as often as possible to see new teachers in action. It doesn’t happen as frequently as I would hope.” Another participant explained that she has difficulty developing rapport with new teachers doing temporary teaching work within her school, but that “once you have the people [occasional teachers] who come into a building regularly, those are the ones that are automatically looked at as being part of my staff.” Another principal described the difficulty of developing sustainable supports for short-term teachers: “If they are only there for those [couple of] weeks, it’s more of a maintenance thing,” rather than prolonged duration of supports. Not only does the time-consuming nature of principal work limit their ability to develop relationships that foster new teacher supports, but the short-term work arrangements of many new teachers, including extended periods of transient and temporary work, also makes the development of open and trusting principal–new teacher relationships and rapport challenging.

During research interviews the principals in our study also discussed both formal and informal support structures for new teachers. The principals recognized formal supports, such as NTIP, as being guided by policy and having available related funding, and saw informal supports as those they developed when new teachers did not qualify under formal policy or program inclusion. One participant explained, “the NTIP program, in and of itself, is a nice program. It allows new teachers to get support from their peers, it gives some system-level support, and it gives them some material to think about and bounce [ideas] off.” One of the supports within NTIP is Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA). The Ontario Ministry of Education has described TPA as a process that provides teachers with meaningful appraisals that encourage professional learning and growth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The process commences with a meeting between the principal and new teacher to discuss professional learning goals. One principal described the TPA process as “our chance to actually really unpack what is happening in the classroom. What is really happening in their teaching?” Following the initial meeting, the principal observes the new teacher in the classroom environment and prepares reflection feedback. The principal discusses the classroom visit with the new teacher at a follow-up meeting, where they also devise next steps in professional learning. The principals viewed the TPA process as a useful strategy to support new teachers on their journey.

In addition to policy-sanctioned supports, principals can develop informal supports for new teachers who regularly work in their schools but who do not qualify for NTIP. According to the participants, the lack of funding and guidelines available for new teachers that do not qualify for NTIP can hinder principal efforts to offer supports, such

as providing the opportunity to meet with experienced teacher mentors, or attend professional learning sessions during the school day. The principals explained that developing informal supports required them to be creative with available resources and developing supports that do not require funding. A key strategy that principals discussed for both informal and formal supports was to engage new teachers within the collaborative school culture. The principals highlighted how a collaborative school community can offer a variety of new teacher supports—for example, new teachers benefit from working within a teaching network with experienced colleagues. Further, they expressed the belief that providing the opportunity for new teachers to work consistently and collaboratively within a school is also crucial when developing sustainable supports for teachers in long-term, consistent teaching employment. Overall, however, the principals found meeting the support needs for some of the newest teachers in daily and short-term teaching work in their school to be challenging.

Some new teachers without available supports may attempt to self-direct their own. As a result of their work being temporary and intermittent, daily and short-term teachers' engagement in school culture is often limited. Some of the principals in the study indicated that some new teachers self-direct their professional learning, especially when there is a lack of district- or school-based supports. Some new teachers develop their own professional and emotional coping strategies, which can negatively influence their instructional practices (Cherubini, 2010; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Youngs, 2007). Some principals in our study found it challenging to help new teachers overcome the lack of job-embedded collaborative learning. As one principal noted, new teachers “are highly educated in that they have done a lot of courses and coursework, but they

haven't necessarily had the time that they need to go over and put what they've learned into practice... it's not fine-tuned or refined." While several principals identified potential benefits of new teachers directing their own professional learning, they also viewed experience and collaboration as essential aspects of the learning process for new teachers. According to one principal, "Matching new teachers with a mentor teaching the same grade or subject is a very positive learning experience for new teachers." Overall, the participants emphasized the energy, passion, and dedication of teachers entering the profession, and see establishing early supports as essential to new teacher success and keeping quality educators in the profession.

Promoting New Driver Confidence

Roadside assistance services strive to reassure their clients that support is available in times of driver need. The principals in our study discussed their desire to develop supports that promote resiliency and confidence in new teachers entering the profession. Each participant shared vivid recollections of their early teaching experiences. Several spoke of specific principals and experienced teacher mentors who offered support on their early journey. A couple of principals, however, discussed the sparse, negative, or nonexistent supports available during their early years. The principals who experienced a positive and supportive entrance into the profession described their motivation to "pay forward" their own experience by supporting new teachers. The principals who described experiencing a lack of available supports also expressed wanting to offer individualized support to the new teachers in their school in an effort to help them to avoid the obstacles they had encountered on their own journey. Throughout the study, the participants

repeatedly expressed their aim to develop individualized and sustainable supports that make a positive, memorable impact for new teachers beginning professional practice.

As they advance in their careers, teachers will remember who offered them early and ongoing support. As experienced teachers themselves, principals have personally experienced how support can build confidence and collaborative skills. One participant expressed the belief that, as principals, they “cannot support [new teachers] enough in those first couple of years, because [principals] are shaping the profession [by providing support to new teachers].” The principals in our study were aware of how valuable the supports they develop and facilitate can be to new teachers entering professional practice. Often, principals can tangibly see teachers benefiting from these supports: As one principal said, “when [new teachers] are being successful, I have people that are so happy [that] they are coming to me and showing me what they have done.” For the participants in the study, developing and facilitating these supports is not only a requirement of their job, but also an important responsibility that they connect to their own prior experiences. According to the principals, the supports can have a broad, ranging influence on new teachers’ short-term teaching experiences, and a positive, lasting impact on teachers’ future experiences in the profession.

Planning for Success on the Road

As a successful merge can be critical for teachers to experience a positive and confident teaching journey, a variety of roadside assistance options could be developed at the district level for the newest teacher-drivers who do not yet qualify for the more formal means of support—namely, meeting the inclusion criteria of NTIP. For example, daily and short-term teachers could potentially access supports more successfully through

their employing school districts, or associated teacher federations. These broader networks have the potential to reach the teachers who move frequently between schools and therefore struggle to build rapport and professional relationships with principals and collaborative school communities. School districts and teacher associations could establish broad professional learning communities for new teachers to set professional learning goals and gain collaborative support for their individual needs. By considering the unique professional learning needs of the newest hired teachers in short-term teaching work, access to individualized supports outside the purview of school principals can be made more widely available. Granting new teachers access to a broader range of supports will build their confidence, preparedness, and focus to facilitate a smooth and successful merge into professional practice.

Conclusion

The analogy in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter conceptualizes the important role school principals have in helping new teachers successfully enter professional practice. In this analogy, teachers are new drivers beginning the long journey of their careers, and principals function as roadside assistance dispatchers. Like assistance dispatchers, the principals have experience in traveling the road and are aware of road conditions. Their prior experiences help them to connect their networks of services with clients.

Principals develop and facilitate, as opposed to directly implement, supports for new teachers. As roadside assistance dispatchers don't usually change flat tires, principals consult with new teachers and employ their available resources and network connections to ensure that someone capable and qualified aids new teachers with their

professional learning needs and gets them back on the teaching road. Similar to offering drivers specialized assistance that is effective and efficient, principals that develop supports for the new teachers in their school call upon others with the right tools and experience to directly support new teachers. This also keeps the principal available to dispatch help to others.

A challenge exists for principals to support new teachers that are not regularly in their school. Similar to some new teachers developing coping skills and self-directing their professional learning, if novice drivers do not have access to contact a roadside assistance dispatcher they may attempt to self-diagnose and repair their own vehicles. While these drivers may temporarily get back on the road, without access to the proper tools and lacking experience in repair, they will eventually need reinforcement. Similar to new teachers that do not yet qualify for NTIP, self-directed learning can become job-embedded if new teachers can gain access to informal supports by engaging in a collaborative school culture or receive supports through a school district or teacher federation. If the new teacher can have access to professional support through a dispatcher, be it a school principal, district or federation leader, then some assistance can be employed to connect new teachers with other educators that have experienced success in driving the teaching road. The collegial support of a collaborative culture instills a sense of confidence in new teachers and reassures them that the road should not be lonely. Akin to roadside assistance dispatching support to ensure the experience of a pleasant road trip, school principals serve to aid the new teachers that are regularly in their school in merging into professional practice. If all new teachers can gain assistance in maneuvering the bumps and turns of the road from school, district or teacher

federation support dispatchers, they will benefit from increased confidence, professional learning and a meaningful journey.

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