

5 TIPS FOR PUTTING NEW TEACHERS ON THE RIGHT PATH

The first year is the most important year of a teacher's career. It's a time of rollercoaster growth, and an opportunity for school leaders to help teachers develop critical skills and determine whether they are likely to become successful educators. Yet it's often treated like a warm-up lap.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, we can learn a lot from a teacher's first-year performance. We studied more than 1,000 first-year teachers across the country, and found:

- **New teachers perform at different levels and grow at different rates**—and these differences may appear even in the first few months of teaching.
- **Teachers who start strong are more likely to remain successful over time.** Those who struggle to improve despite getting useful feedback and support in the first year tend not to improve in the second.
- **Certain characteristics seem to set the most successful new teachers apart.** We found that first-year teachers who are purposeful, responsive and focused on student understanding develop more quickly.

Here are five ways school leaders can help set first-year teachers up for success.

1. Set clear expectations for performance and growth.

By the end of their first year, teachers should be able to create a positive classroom culture, manage student behavior and lead focused lessons. They should also be responsive to feedback, and able to show that they are mastering and building on the crucial skills that set them up for long-term success. Communicate these expectations to all new teachers from day 1.

2. Pay close attention to every first-year teacher's performance, starting on the first day.

Instead of taking a wait-and-see approach, consider a teacher's first year as a telling period of development and growth. Observe them frequently. It's common for new teachers to face challenges, but which ones are showing real evidence of growth? Which ones respond to feedback? Which ones persistently struggle?

3. Use multiple measures to assess performance.

Research shows that multiple measures provide a more accurate picture of teacher performance than any one measure alone. Even in a district where formal teacher

evaluations are based solely on classroom observations, school leaders should consider any available data on student learning to help identify their first-year teachers' strengths and development areas.

4. Focus on the most essential teaching skills.

We prioritize four key skills that are associated with a strong foundation for growth: teachers' ability to use time well, set clear expectations, implement routines and deliver instruction clearly. School leaders should look for evidence of these skills during every observation of a first-year teacher and focus their feedback on how the teacher can improve in these areas.

5. Make honest decisions about retention.

Many first-year teachers who struggle and don't improve continue to perform poorly in their second year, improving less in two years than most new teachers do in just part of their first year. It's difficult to tell people that their best effort is just not good enough, but allowing unsuccessful teachers to start long careers in the classroom does a disservice to both them and their students.