

The Growing Great Teachers Toolkit

An introduction to redesigning schools to support new, “rookie” teachers, improve teacher retention, and increase learning for all students

The Challenge

Being a new teacher is one of the most challenging professional-level jobs. And it’s increasing in difficulty, as all teachers wrestle with more rigorous college- and-career ready standards and student populations with greater needs. Estimates vary, but researchers have found that after four years, 17 to 40 percent of teachers have left the profession, with turnover rates generally higher in low-income schools.¹

All school and district leaders want to grow their new teachers into effective educators who stay at their schools. The challenge is usually knowing 1) *what, exactly, new teachers need* and 2) *how to find the resources to provide them with extra support*—a challenge that often feels daunting in the face of severely limited resources.

The Opportunity

But it *is* possible to provide new teachers the support they need, *with* the resources school leaders have today. And it’s incumbent on central office leaders, such as chief human capital officers and directors of professional development, to make sure the policies and processes are in place to ensure school leaders can make these strategic choices.

Based on our work with school systems, we’ve developed a framework for thinking about how to support new teachers. This framework also provides other schoolwide benefits, including leadership opportunities for highly effective, experienced teachers; more individual attention to student needs; and more opportunities for job-embedded professional development. Instead of seeming like a drain on school resources, new teachers can actually be a catalyst for [Strategic School Design](#) that improves instruction and increases teacher retention across the board.

The key concept is this: **In strategic schools and school systems, new teachers’ roles are fundamentally different from those of their experienced peers.**

From Rookies to MVPs—Through “Shelter” and “Development”

Defining “new teachers”

There are many ways to enter teaching. For example, through pathways like:

- A “traditional” undergraduate degree at a school of education
- Alternative certification programs
- Programs like Teach for America that offer summer training and some yearlong support
- Para-to-teacher programs
- Teacher “residencies,” which can train “pre-service” teacher candidates or new teachers -of-record; run by the district or by third-party partners.

Regardless of how they enter, all new teachers require significant support. Therefore, we created our framework to apply to all kinds of new teachers, and we call them all **rookie teachers**. Rookie teachers can be **pre-service teachers** (i.e., not formally responsible for their students’ learning and not paid a full teacher’s salary) or **teachers -of -record (TOR)** (i.e., formally responsible for the learning outcomes of a set of students and paid full teacher’s salary). Rookie teachers may have 0-3 years of experience—whatever it takes to become solid in their role.

Two key elements: “shelter” and “development”

	 Shelter	 Development
<i>Definition:</i>	Simplifying the job	Training and learning
<i>Improves:</i>	Retention	Effectiveness
<i>Why?</i>	Teachers will stay if their workload is manageable while they improve their craft.	Teachers will become more effective with increased coaching and professional learning opportunities.
<i>Example approaches:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rookies teach a reduced load, giving them fewer students and more free periods • Rookies have reduced lesson planning responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rookies receive at least weekly cycles of observation, feedback, and coaching from instructional experts • Rookies have protected time weekly to observe a mentor teacher modelling excellent teaching

What do rookie teachers need? Like apprentices, medical residents, junior lawyers, minor league players, and pretty much most professions, they need the opportunity to grow their skills with the guidance of experienced, effective practitioners. In other words, their differentiated role needs two components: shelter and development.

- **Shelter** refers to the any strategy that simplifies the regular teaching job, e.g., fewer preps, students, hours teaching, or outside-the-classroom responsibilities. This gives rookie teachers extra time or mental energy to acquire new skills alongside their classroom responsibilities.

- **Development** refers to any strategy where rookie teachers learn their craft, through observing master teachers, collaborative planning, practicing skills, and receiving feedback. This should not be limited to “new teacher induction” or one-off PD workshops, but rather “connected” to their everyday work through rigorous, job-embedded opportunities.

Rookie teacher roles must include *both* shelter and development. If we shelter rookie teachers without providing them additional development opportunities, we are not helping them grow into their roles. If we provide additional development opportunities without simplifying their responsibilities, we add more strain onto what is already an overwhelming first year in the classroom.

Fundamentally Rethinking Resources to Support Rookie Teachers

Key resources: people, time, and money

Growing great teachers in this way requires a fundamentally different approach to using a school’s professional learning resources. By reorganizing people, time, and money to develop new teachers strategically, schools can also create leadership opportunities and significantly improve instruction.

Schools need to provide the following:

- **High-quality, well-supported “guiding teachers”:** Guiding teachers can be master teachers, mentors, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, or others. We use the term “guiding teacher” to encompass many models. To be effective, they should be rigorously hired into specific job descriptions and compensated accordingly for their increased contributions.
- **More time to grow skills, built into a fundamentally redesigned role:** The role provides shelter and development in a “gradual release” model by protecting *substantially more time* for practice and training than a typical new teacher would experience, including:
 - **Weekly collaboratively planning time:** The rookie teacher and guiding teacher have protected time to review high-quality, vetted, college- and career-ready standards-aligned curriculum and prepare for instruction together.
 - **Co-teaching:** time to teach alongside their guiding teacher.
 - **Cycles of feedback and observation:** At least weekly, the guiding teacher observes the candidate lead teach and gives specific, actionable feedback.

Many schools think they support their new teachers but do not end up providing the intensive, targeted support that rookie teachers need. Growing great teachers means avoiding the following pitfalls of old, un-strategic practice:

- Providing mentor teachers who are not compensated for their time, unclear on their role, or not trained to effectively guide new teachers.
- One-off workshops or meetings that do not connect to new teachers’ day-to-day work.
- Poorly structured collaborative planning time that focuses on administrative issues, venting about students, or incomplete lesson planning.
- Adding professional learning responsibilities to an already overwhelming new career.

Reorganizing what schools already have

Why don't new teachers get the support they need? It's not because teachers, school leaders, or district leaders don't think it matters; it's because education leaders perceive new teacher supports as prohibitively resource intensive and difficult to implement.

But the key concept is this: **ERS's work in districts around the country has indicated that schools can provide strategic new teacher support by fundamentally rethinking the way they use existing resources.**

The Growing Great Teachers Toolkit provides examples and planning tools to help schools and systems understand how. It includes:

- **The Playbook:** Offers five examples of how to provide shelter and development to rookie teachers—that can also inspire home grown approaches.
- **The Make-it-Work Planning Tool:** Lets school leaders design their own model by balancing costs, schedules, class sizes, and other variables.
- **The Design-for-Excellence Workbook:** Ensures school leaders have a detailed plan for how to select guiding teachers and structure planning, observation, and feedback time.

The School System as Enabler and Supporter

Individual schools will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to create differentiated roles for rookie teachers on their own. They need the central office to redesign its policies, processes, and resource allocation to support school leaders in this crucial task. This may mean establishing formal selection criteria for “guiding teachers” and allocating money for stipends; freeing schools from rigid class size mandates that limit scheduling flexibility; providing rigorous, aligned curricula so teachers can focus on implementation; or many other steps.

Ultimately, school systems need to be ready to support their schools in [Strategic School Design](#)—or the practice of setting a vision based on student needs, and aligning resources to that vision. Strategic School Design requires breaking down our long-held assumptions of what the teacher's job looks like and how we “do school.” The need to better support new teachers can be a catalyst for transformative change at the district and school level.

The key concept is: **The central office must provide the resources, flexibility, and support for schools to grow great teachers out of their rookies—and that investment can pay dividends in improved instruction throughout schools.**

Chief Talent Officers, Chief School Support Officers, and Directors of Professional Development can take the lead by first assessing their school system's current practices and processes in the self-assessment below; this will offer avenues to begin the change.

Growing Great Teachers: Central Office-Level Self-Assessment

Instructions:

Read each of the following statements under “School System ‘Enabling Conditions’ to Grow Great Teachers” and rate where your school system falls:

- 3= My school system has this element, evident across the vast majority of schools (including high-needs schools)
- 2= My school system has some aspect of this element, or only evident in some schools
- 1= My school system does not have this element, or only evident in very few schools

Elements scored as 3 are strengths to build on. Elements scored as 2 are prime opportunities for further exploration and improvement. Elements scored as 1 may need more time and attention to improve.

When all elements are tallied up, a score of:

- 30 or higher represents a highly effective system with clear opportunities to make an impact
- 20-29 represents a school system with several opportunities for potential improvement
- 13-19 represents a school system that needs to invest deeply in creating the conditions for great teaching and learning

Elements	#	School System “Enabling Conditions” to Grow Great Teachers	Self-Assessment
The right people in all schools...	1	Guiding teachers: A strong cadre of rigorously selected, subject-matched guiding teachers in schools that host rookie teachers.	
	2	Pipeline of excellent rookie teachers: A strong pipeline of aspiring rookie teachers with strong learning mindsets who are likely to stay in the school/district for multiple years and to grow into highly effective teachers.	
	3	Strong teacher evaluation system: Clear, rigorous, evidence-based teacher evaluation system that accurately identifies the most effective teachers to act as guiding teachers and accurately identifies rookie teachers’ opportunities for growth, as well as identifies teachers who are not growing and should be exited.	
	4	Clear roles for rookies and guiding teachers: Clear rookie teacher and guiding teacher career paths and compensation models that acknowledge their differentiated levels of contribution and provide specific, consistent expectations for their roles.	
	5	Rigorous, comprehensive curricula: All teachers, including rookies, have access to rigorous and coherent curricula that aligns to college- and career-ready standards (CCRS).	

...with effective instructional support	6	Content experts: The faculty who support rookie teachers have deep content-area expertise related to CCRS and the school’s curriculum and assessments, and they support a small enough cadre of rookies.	
	7	School leaders with expertise in rigorous curricula: School leaders demonstrate CCRS understanding, and deliberately design and manage their new teacher support system to grow teachers’ abilities to instruct in alignment with CCRS.	
	8	Time for collaborative planning: The school calendar allows sufficient time for expert-led, content-specific professional learning, ideally for <i>all</i> teachers, but at minimum for rookies. “Sufficient time” means at least 90 minutes per week and eight full days per year for teacher collaboration.	
...and sufficient and flexible resources	9	Resource flexibility: School leaders have clear and transparent flexibilities—including flexibility in hiring, staffing, scheduling, and other areas of resource use—to design and implement a cost-neutral new teacher support strategy.	
	10	Deliberate school sizes: School size and programming enable best practices in professional learning; for example, grade sizes are large enough to support shared-content teaching teams and matched-subject, rookie-guiding teacher pairs.	
...supported through strong central processes for innovation and continuous improvement	11	Aligned school planning processes: The district’s core school planning processes (hiring, staffing, budgeting, etc.) occur on a logical and efficient timeline that support the timely and deliberate placement of rookie and guiding teacher pairs.	
	12	Continuous improvement processes: The district has clear and effective processes for monitoring the implementation of new teacher support structures and has the capacity to adjust course as necessary.	
	13	Effective community partnerships: The district builds external partnerships that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of new teacher supports. This may include community partnerships that provide low-cost coverage for protected time for new teacher development, or external instructional partnerships that build the capacity of rookie and guiding teachers.	

Total: _____

Conclusion

Teachers are the most influential in-school factor in student success. By providing new teachers **sheltered, simplified roles** with ample **practice-based development opportunities**, schools and systems can help their rookies grow into, rather than burn out of, the teaching career. This kicks off a virtuous cycle of retention and instructional improvement that will pay off in student learning for years to come.

¹ Gray, Lucinda; Taie, Soheyla; O’Rear, Isaiah. *Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years*. US National Center on Education Statistics. April 2015. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.pdf>; Ingersoll, Richard. “Is there really a teacher shortage?” *Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington*. September 2003. <http://www.education.uw.edu/ctp/sites/default/files/ctpmail/PDFs/Shortage-RI-09-2003.pdf>.