

## Op-Ed: For First-Year Teachers, It's Sink or Swim

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Ellen Moir of the New Teacher Center says, 'We are not setting up most new teachers to make a difference, and their students pay the price.'

By [Ellen Moir](#)

September 10, 2012



Do you think new teachers are not given enough resources to succeed? (Photo: Getty Images)

When students across the country go back to school this month, many will have an inexperienced rookie teacher. The teaching workforce is “[greening](#)” and the most common teacher this year is a beginner in the first year of teaching. It’s startling but true.

Despite the current focus on making sure all educators are effective, we are not setting up most new teachers to make a difference, and their students pay the price.

I don’t know any successful businesses that would hire entry-level grads for the most difficult positions, isolate them from coworkers, and then expect them to perform as well as more experienced colleagues. But that’s exactly what we do with many new teachers who often

receive the most challenging teaching assignments in the classrooms and schools whose students need the profession's best teachers.

Each fall, thousands of bright and energetic beginning teachers receive little more than a student roster and a classroom key. Many struggle, in isolation, planning ways to meet the profound and distinct needs of their students. They work long hours to put an unwieldy array of resources to use, or even to access these resources in the first place. Even the most promising new teachers, who learned a lot about effective teaching, can't fathom how to put that learning into practice. They know their students deserve more.

It's a sink or swim experience.

Not surprisingly, 46 percent of new teachers in the U.S. leave the profession within five years, just as they would have started to become effective. But it doesn't have to be like this.

[Research](#) shows that when new teachers receive the right support, they are more effective and remain in the profession. What does the right support look like? We call it [comprehensive new teacher mentoring and induction](#). It involves the guidance of successful, experienced teachers who have been trained to mentor new teachers and create relevant, timely opportunities for groups of new teachers to learn together. These highly trained mentor teachers work with new teachers in their classrooms, where they can see the actual challenges being faced. Since these experienced teachers grasp student needs quicker, they ask the right questions and share relevant and effective ideas about the best way to meet those needs. They help new teachers make better and faster decisions. As a result, beginning teachers are able to focus less on day-to-day survival and more on helping their students learn more. Simply put, they become better teachers faster.

So what are we waiting for? We have it within our power to help students learn and achieve more. We can make sure new teachers aren't just left to sink or swim. We can give them the right support, from the get-go, so they can actually make a difference in their students' lives.

Odds are you know many students who have a first-year teacher this year. We owe it to each of them to do a better job, starting now.



*[Ellen Moir](#) is founder and chief executive officer of [New Teacher Center](#), a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers and school leaders. As a passionate advocate for our nation's newest teachers, she has dedicated her life to developing solutions to support them and to ensure all students get a great teacher.*