Dear Master Teacher,

Take a moment and close your eyes. Travel back ten, fifteen, maybe twenty years or more to your first year of school as a teacher. What memories do you have of those early days with students? Did you have a smooth transition into the classroom or were there many bumps along the way? Envision your first classroom. Briefly allow your mind’s eye to travel across the space of your room. What do you see? What do you hear? What are you, the teacher, doing? What are your students doing? Now, open your eyes and think about your classroom today. What strategies have you developed over the years to make your classroom an exciting, innovative space for learners? How has your classroom management changed? How do those early days compare with your mastery of teaching today? As a teacher, you have many professional accomplishments, and I am calling on you to take on the role of mentor for a beginning teacher.

Maybe your first year was similar to mine. At the beginning of the school year, I didn’t know what questions to ask and or know who was supposed to help me. I didn’t know how to order supplies and I didn’t know where the paper was kept for the copier. If I ran out of markers or pencils it was easier for me to run to the local dollar store rather than search through closets at school. I had a familiar format for writing lessons plans I had learned in college, but I was told they were unacceptable at my new school. I was never told what was wrong with them, just to change. Surrounded by thirty eager to learn third graders, I felt overwhelmed and unprepared to provide them with the quality instruction they needed. By the end of the year, the children and I had survived and even thrived, but having a strong, supportive mentor like you from the beginning would have made the year so much more successful.

This is where your expertise as a veteran educator is needed. A large component of a strong induction program involves experienced teachers mentoring new teachers during the first three years of their career. Teacher induction is most successful when it is conducted over multiple years and set up as a cohort. As a master teacher in your content area you will be paired with a new teacher. Together you will share a common planning, observe each other’s classrooms, and even team teach certain classes. After observing lessons, your task will be to provide the new teacher with specific feedback and suggestions for improvement. Also, don’t forget that as a mentor you will also learn from the new teacher. Be ready to embrace the enthusiasm and new ideas of your younger peer!

Ready to get started? Here are a few simple ways to help new teachers begin the school year:

* Introduce yourself - Let the new teacher know you are available to to help them begin this exciting journey.
* Introduce VIPs - Make sure they are familiar with school staff including the principal, office staff, and custodians.
* Tour the building - Point out places of interest including the office, gymnasium, cafeteria, and restrooms. Don’t forget to include the copy machine and the supply closet.
* Help set up the classroom - Offer suggestions and be ready to move furniture and staple bulletin boards!
* Write scripts - Help the teacher develop bell-to-bell instruction for the first week of school.
* Encourage questions - New teachers may be overwhelmed with all the information coming their way. Remind them to ask for clarification when needed.

New teachers need guidance from veteran teachers. Just like you go out of your way to help students in your classroom become successful, you could help strengthen the skills of a novice teacher. You have an opportunity to shape the future of education. Mentoring provides a solid foundation of support for both new and experienced teachers. Teachers collaborate to solve problems, plan lessons, and make school decisions. No teacher should be expected to face their career alone. Consider volunteering your time mentoring a new teacher. You have spent your career dedicated to helping students. Isn’t it time to prepare the next generation of teachers to do the same?

Sincerely,

JULIA DURBIN BISHOP

Lee County High School

6th-12th grade FMD teacher

Julia has spent twelve years as a special education teacher working with middle and high school students for the Lee County school district. She is actively involved in numerous teacher leadership initiatives across the state including CTEPS, EngagEDKY, and KYATN. She was recently selected to be a State Teacher Fellow for Hope Street Group. Julia earned her National Board Certification in 2014 and enjoys mentoring NBCT candidates. She received a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Eastern Kentucky University and a Master’s Degree in Special Education from Western Kentucky University. Julia is currently working towards a Ph.D. in Leadership with a focus on Special Education ,from the University of the Cumberlands. Julia lives on a hobby farm in Beattyville, Kentucky with her husband and two children.

Scroll down for infographics.

