



# Just for the ASKing!



Bruce Oliver and the Just ASK Team

September 2021  
Volume XVIII Issue VI

## Meeting the Diverse Needs of Teachers



Bruce Oliver, the author of *Just for the ASKing!*, lives in Burke, Virginia. He uses the knowledge, skills, and experience he acquired as a teacher, professional developer, mentor, and middle school principal as he works with school districts in across the nation. He has written more than 180 issues of *Just for the ASKing!* He is the author of *Points to Ponder* and also a co-author of *Creating a Culture for Learning: Your Guide to PLCs and More*.

One of Just ASK's most popular books (and corresponding workshop series) is *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*. (<https://justaskpublications.com/mtn>) Author Paula Rutherford provides an extensive analysis of how to address the learning requirements of all children, no matter their readiness levels. As I was recently paging through that book, I had an aha moment: Not only is it important to support the learning needs of each student, it is equally advantageous for leaders to address the individual needs of the teaching staff.

All principals want to have the best school possible. They go to great lengths to hire the most qualified candidates. Then the real work begins. It is incumbent upon all leaders to look across their faculty as a whole and consider how each individual functions on a day-to-day basis to provide the best learning experience possible for the young people they teach. The question about teacher diverse needs then becomes:

**What are some important considerations that an exceptional leader should take into account in order to have a positive and productive school?**

As you read the nine suggestions provided in this issue, ask yourself what suggestion you would add to make this a “**Top Ten List of Ways to Meet the Diverse Needs of Teachers?**”

### **Identify Levels of Expertise and Comfort with Distance/Virtual Learning**

Reports and updates indicate that teachers are working harder than ever as they set up distance learning practices for their students. No one ever envisioned that this would become the “new normal.” Teachers have different skill levels when it comes to technical execution. Administrators need to touch base regularly with teachers to determine how online learning is progressing. Some principals are asking staff members who are highly skilled in the area of technology to check in

with staff members to answer questions and provide support. This is a new area for all of us and we should do all we can to ensure that stress is not taking its toll on practitioners who struggle with adjusting to these new ways of teaching and learning. As we look to the future, we want to make sure that each teacher is as technological competent as possible.

### **Provide Follow-Up Support as Needed After Introduction of New Instructional Initiatives**

On-going professional development is essential in order for teachers to keep abreast of developments in the field of education. Often professional development is provided for faculties as a whole, usually by the principal or an outsider with an expertise in a particular field. Once the new innovation/concept is presented to the faculty as a whole, the next step is for each teacher to put the new ideas into practice. Some principals feel that their role as an instructional leader has been fulfilled. This is a mistaken conclusion for several reasons. Not all teachers have the capability to translate what they have learned into meaningful lessons for their students. They might need additional time to digest the new approaches, perhaps requiring some small group, follow-up sessions. Still others are resistant to change and they will resort to practices that satisfy their comfort level instead of incorporating new approaches into their lessons. Much like teachers must be aware of the individual needs of their students, school leaders have to take into account how each faculty member will implement any changes. Perceptive leaders are consistent monitors of how instruction is taking place in classrooms, and, when necessary, they are able to follow up with individuals who may need more prompting.

### **Oversee Purposeful Mentoring Relationships for Novice Teachers**

Teachers need to feel safe as they progress in their careers, especially novice teachers. Schools and districts with strong mentoring programs can better ensure the mental and pedagogical security that teachers need. Experienced mentors can provide honest feedback in a nonevaluative manner that allows new teachers the chance to practice and reflect on their performance. Confidential conversations between seasoned individuals and teachers new to the profession can build confidence, relieve stress, and develop relationships that can be long lasting, and that can make the difference between teachers who choose to remain in the profession beyond year one.

### **Ensure All New Teachers Have a Personal Cheerleader**

Equally important as providing support to first year teachers is the pairing of an experienced teacher with a new staff member when they come on board. All schools have established cultures and when a trusted adult provides insights, direction and even cheerleading for a new colleague, their adjustment may become fluid because they now have a “go-to” colleague whenever they need assistance or advice. When the newest staff member is left to her own devices to assimilate into a new setting, it can be time consuming



and even painful. Facilitating the inclusion of a new individual can make all the difference. The message to the entire staff is: We care about your success, and we want you to feel accepted and comfortable in your new home.

### **Build Coaching (Formal or Informal) Capacity**

Another resource who can meet teachers' needs is an instructional coach. In most schools, when new programs or curricula are introduced and ultimately required of all teachers, some individuals need more collaboration in order to reach the school's goal of universal internal capacity. Much like mentors, coaches can furnish advice, model strategies, and be a consistent and compassionate sounding board. Not all faculty members require assistance but for those who need it in order to implement specific methodology, a coach can be a godsend. When school budgets do not provide for coaches, leaders may look to existing faculty members who are outstanding in their field to provide advice and direction.

### **Make Reaching Out for Assistance a Norm**

If our goal is to have the best possible school, it is essential that the leaders establish an environment in which any teacher, at any time, feels safe in reaching out for support when they are facing adversity in their work with students or parents. There are some practitioners who feel that they will be viewed as less than capable, or even failures, if they ask for assistance. As a result, they will continue to struggle and students will be the unwitting victims of a mediocre learning environment. When leaders model vulnerability themselves, a teacher's comfort level will be unguarded when they feel the need to reach out for help. In short, trust is all-important and indispensable in a successful school.

### **Get to Know Each Staff Member as a Unique Individual with a Life Beyond the Schoolhouse**

Diversity among a faculty can reveal itself in many ways; for this reason, it is important for leaders to get to know each staff member on a personal level. All staff members bring a variety of personal experiences to the workplace. Each may present a differing information processing style, unique instructional delivery, wide-ranging cultural background, strongly-held personal value system, and be greatly influenced by generational viewpoints. One leadership goal is to know as much as possible about each teacher in order to ensure shared understandings of core values and overall clear communication. When teachers know that decision makers care about them as individuals, interactions are far more likely to be honest, straightforward, and productive.

### **Establish an Understanding that Parents are Partners in the Education of Their Children**

A significant component of successful teaching is how individuals work with families. Some



teachers are hesitant to contact parents unless there is a problem at school. When bad news is the only news that a parent or guardian hears from a teacher, the result may be conflict or anxiety for both parties. Administrators rarely know how their staff members interact with parents unless it comes to their attention in a negative context. The reality is that some teachers may need guidance and advice in their communication with families. Principals can encourage their staffs to share good news with parents in order to improve their relationships. Over time, teachers and families can develop partnerships that will ultimately lead to harmonious interactions, the ability to solve problems together. And better learning for students.

### **Create Conditions in Which Everybody Wins!**

Sometimes there are wise decisions on the part of the school leader that can not only meet the needs of certain teachers but also provide transparency for the entire staff. Principals and other members of the administrative staff can make a conscious effort to provide **structure** and **predictability** for the entire school so that teachers can go about their daily tasks with confidence and decisiveness. When leaders take the time to provide **reassurance** and **encouragement** in one-on-one interactions, the residual benefits for students are far reaching. When teachers are given the opportunity to contribute their ideas and talents for the good of the school, the result is often **success**, **personal good health**, and **happiness** on a widespread level.

**All teachers want to have confidence in their leaders. They want to know that the success of the school is in good hands. They want to believe that the person in charge is a deeply caring individual who will always have their best interest at heart. When the leader consistently “walks the walk” and not just “talks the talk,” the school climate will be closer to ideal for everyone.**

What is the one more suggestion you would add to make this a “**Top Ten List of Ways to Meet the Diverse Needs of Teachers?**”

© 2021 Just ASK Publications & Professional Development

Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution of this newsletter for non-commercial use only. Please include the following citation on all copies:

Oliver, Bruce. “Meeting the Diverse Needs of Teachers” <https://justaskpublications.com/jfta/meeting-the-diverse-needs-of-teachers/> **Just for the ASKing!** September 2021. Reproduced with permission of Just ASK Publications & Professional Development.

