

## Belief and Support: What First-Year Teachers Need

by Yesenia Solis-Laboy, Second Grade Teacher, Lake Carolina Elementary

It was our open house two days before the start of school. I was excited and anxious about meeting my students and their parents for the first time. In just two short days, I was finally going to have my own classroom. I put the last touches on each desk, taping down the name tags when my principal walked in. I was surprised to see her because it was just a couple of minutes before the doors would open to families.

“I don’t mean to alarm you,” she began, “but I did want to let you know that a parent requested to move her child to another classroom. She doesn’t want her son, James, in a first-year teacher’s class.”

My heart sank.

I was distraught and confused about why a parent didn’t want their child in my class without even getting to know me. The principal added, “I am not going to move him because I believe you will be a great teacher for him.”

I thanked my principal for her honesty and quickly went to find Ms. Hunter and the other second grade teachers. I shared my feelings about this parent that had judged me prematurely. I was grateful to have someone that could understand where I was coming from. She reassured me that our principal was correct; I was more than capable of helping any student in my class. I was relieved that I had so much support from my colleagues, however, I was still nervous about meeting the parents. I quickly put myself together as I headed back to my classroom for the open house.



Yesenia Solis-Laboy is from Puerto Rico. She spent most of her formal education traveling to different military bases while her father served in the armed forces. She graduated from the University of South Carolina in 2019 with a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education. She is currently a second grade elementary school teacher in her third year of teaching. Yesenia enjoys reading in her spare time and sharing her love of reading with her students. She currently resides in Elgin, South Carolina.


James' mother had many questions for me. She asked about my teaching philosophy, how I planned to help struggling students in my classroom, forms of communication, and more. She also mentioned that she was an educator herself. This made me wonder even more why she wouldn't want to give me a chance.

She had been in my shoes.

Her worries and concerns became clear when she mentioned that James was not a strong reader. Now, I understood her hesitation. A parent wants what is best for their child, especially when it comes to their education. His mother didn't believe that a first-year teacher could be that person for him.



I wanted to prove her wrong. I wanted her to know that I would do anything I could to help her child succeed in my classroom.

I set out to understand James' reading struggles. I began to notice that he did not like independent reading. He would play with his book, fake read, or disrupt other students while they read. When I would sit next to him and ask him to read to me, he would stay very quiet and seemed worried that others could hear him.





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I sought help from my reading coach. I wanted to make sure I took all the necessary steps to support him. She felt that guided reading would be the most beneficial. It would allow me to sit in a small group setting and focus on his particular needs. I was, however, a bit unsure about how to do it. I met with the reading coach multiple times a week to create a plan to help James and all of my students succeed in reading.



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As the year went on, I leaned on my CarolinaTIP Coach, Mrs. Stewart. She was someone full of knowledge that I could rely on to help me with my classroom needs and emotional support. She showed me how to approach guided reading. Mrs. Stewart also made it clear that if I ever needed anything, I could call or message her at any time. She would regularly call and ask how I was doing. We would talk about anything and everything, even if it had nothing to do with school. I knew that I could count on her for anything.



I implemented guided reading, but James still did not progress. My school decided to train my reading coach and me in a new program that required us to work with 1-2 students for 30 minutes each day. We realized there was a missing link in helping students like James and hoped this would bridge that gap.


When we first began, James was very nervous. We sat at my small group table, and I said to him, “Look around the room. Everyone has headphones on, and they will not be able to hear you reading. I am the only one that will be listening to you.” As soon as I said this, I could see the relief on his face. He needed reassurance that he was not going to be judged by his peers.

I worked with him every single day. He opened up more and more. He became excited to read. Before, I would have to ask him multiple times to sit down with me, and now he was reminding me of when we were supposed to begin. He finally felt comfortable reading to me. He even started to open up about what he loved to do outside of school, like playing football.



At the end of the year, I received an email from James’ mom saying, “I want to thank you for everything you have done for my child this year. You have helped my child more than I could have ever imagined.” When I read the email, I was relieved, excited, and overjoyed. I knew that I had worked very hard to make sure James succeeded. As a new teacher, I believe that I was more willing to seek out the help that I needed to support my students than others more secure in this profession. In the end, all the teachers at my school were trained in the program this past summer. We realized the importance of reaching all students at their level and implementing a program to help them succeed.

CarolinaTIP has helped me realize that even though I was a first-year teacher, I knew what I was supposed to do in my own classroom. Though college prepared me to manage a room full of students, CarolinaTIP helped me feel confident in what I was doing. They heard my concerns, celebrated my achievements, and followed my highs and lows. They encouraged me to share my struggles and in return, helped me when I asked. All new teachers deserve the opportunity to show what they are capable of -- even in their first year.

We just need others to believe in us.



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