

## The Business of School: Helping Teachers Succeed

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*Mentoring is a **powerful approach to help new teachers** be successful in their first years of teaching. The strength of the program lies in the **support and assistance** of the trained mentors—colleagues of the new teachers, with a wealth of experience, skills and resources to provide support.*

### What is a Mentoring Program?

- ▶ A mentor program provides new teachers with a structured format for **planning and improving instruction**. It is different from an orientation, which covers the rules and regulations of the teaching assignment.
- ▶ Many state departments of education require the services of a mentor as **part of licensing** requirements for beginning teachers.
- ▶ A well-organized and smoothly functioning mentoring program requires **careful planning**. Individuals should **know their roles and be prepared or trained** to assume them, and they should have **adequate materials and time** to engage successfully in the events.

### Everyone Wins

- ▶ Participating in mentor training and serving as a mentor are **professionally rewarding activities** for the mentor.
- ▶ The long-term results of the mentor/new teacher relationship can **benefit students of both teachers**.

### Selection Criteria for Mentors

Being a subject area expert doesn't necessarily make a person a good teacher; being a good teacher doesn't necessarily make a person a good mentor.

The **relationship established between the mentor and the new teacher is the most important** element for a successful mentoring program. Mentors must be:

- ▶ Willing to devote **the time and energy** to participating in a community of learners with the **goal of improving student learning**;
- ▶ **Aware of adult learning needs and the developmental processes of new teachers**;
- ▶ Able to **guide colleagues** in identifying problems and possible solutions, rather than telling them how to change;
- ▶ **Open to new ideas and new ways** to solve problems;



- ▶ Able to **see both long- and short-range goals**;
- ▶ **Trustworthy, empathetic, open-minded and free from prejudice.**

### The Mentor Selection Process

- ▶ A pool of mentors should be trained, and then assignments can be made. Since the mentor training provides **valuable professional development for the mentors**, they will learn from the experience, even if they don't serve as mentors immediately.
- ▶ **Inform the mentor** as to whether mentor compensation is tangible (stipend) or intangible (professional prestige).
- ▶ Ideally, the mentors and new teachers should be **matched by subject or grade level, and located within the same school.** There may be **exceptions.**
- ▶ The **best mentor for a new art, music or theater teacher might well be another art, music or theater teacher, even if that person is not in the same school.** Communication between physically distant matches can be facilitated by easy access to e-mail or a phone.

### Familiarizing New Teachers with the Mentor Program

New teachers **need to be fully informed** about the program in advance, in order to **reduce any feelings of fear or discomfort** about having a more experienced colleague providing feedback to them.

### Scheduling Time for Mentoring

- ▶ As a guideline, a **minimum of one hour per week** needs to be set aside to allow the mentor and the new teacher to work together.
- ▶ The **details of how** mentors and new teachers find time to work together **will vary across schools.**
- ▶ **Administrators play a key role** in facilitating the arrangement of time for the mentor program.

### Mentoring and Teacher Evaluation: The Distinctions

- ▶ The mentor program provides a **reflection of teaching**—feedback from a trusted colleague for the **purpose of supporting ongoing professional development.**

- ▶ These reflections are **built on high levels of trust** between the new teacher and the mentor, and the mentee must have confidence that the **mentor will not betray that trust** to the administrator.
- ▶ The relationship with a mentor must be **free from the fear of negative consequences for honesty.**
- ▶ The mentor program **should not be confused with evaluation** by a superior for the purpose of continuing employment.

### Role of the Administrator

- ▶ The administrator **manages the details** of implementation and **fosters an attitude of support** for the mentoring program and for the new teachers within the school.
- ▶ Administrators must be willing to **dedicate the time, resources and energy necessary** for the program to be successful.
- ▶ Administrators should **introduce the mentoring program to the entire school staff.** Staff members who are not directly involved in the program will be **more apt to support the program and its participants if they know** who is doing what, when and why.

### Tell People What You Are Doing!

- ▶ Showcase the program as an example of the district's **commitment** to supporting new teachers in order to **develop and retain the best.**
- ▶ **When hiring new teachers, mention the mentor program** as an example of the district's commitment to supporting new teachers.
- ▶ **Make arrangements for candidates** to meet with a new teacher and mentor to learn about the program firsthand.
- ▶ The **mentoring program** may provide the **competitive edge in recruiting** a highly qualified candidate.