

Supporting Music Education: Helping Teachers Succeed

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 who have a wealth of experience, skills and resources to provide support.

What is a Mentoring Program?

- A mentoring 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. They should have adequate materials and time to engage successfully in the mentoring process.

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 participate 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 through cognitive coaching rather than by 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 before assignments are 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**.
- 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 phone or e-mail.

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**.
- **Administrators play a key role** in facilitating the arrangement of time for the mentoring program.

Mentoring and Teacher Evaluation: The Distinctions

- The mentoring 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 mentoring program **should not be confused with evaluation** of a supervisor 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 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 mentoring 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.

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