“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

- John Crosby
Welcome!

As a mentor, you are an integral part of a team striving to promote the effectiveness of incoming teachers. Working together, mentors, teachers and support personnel will provide a quality education for students. Thank you for volunteering your time to ensure a successful year for our incoming teachers. Without your willingness to share your knowledge, skill, and expertise, we could not reach our goal of allowing every student to live up to their potential, both academically and personally.

The mentor is the key to a successful support system for incoming teachers.

The mentor teacher:

- Is committed to enhancing the status of teachers
- Holds high expectations for students
- Conveys enthusiasm for learning to teachers and students
- Believes all students can learn and succeed
- Shares ideas and initiates change
- Models effective teaching
- Provides hands on support in classroom as needed
- Brainstorms lesson planning and classroom management
Our program goal is for teachers to evolve to the point where they are confident and independent practitioners, yet also able to understand the importance of collaboration and teamwork in educating a child.

**Mentor’s Role**

The primary role of the mentor is to support the mentees as they assess their own teaching and student learning. The mentor:

- helps teachers collect their own data and information
- provides data and information
- promotes opportunities for reflection
- helps teachers plan

**Sources of data for assessing teaching/learning:**

- Peer observation
- Watching someone else teach
- Sharing with colleagues
- Video-taping
- Looking at student work
- Self-assessing
- Interactive journals
- Conferencing
- Student/Parent feedback
- Administrator’s observation feedback
Remember, your job as mentors is to listen to the language and behavior cues of the teacher and pay attention to the circumstances in order to understand how you might best provide appropriate support. There is no prescription for your work as mentors just as there is no fail-safe way to teach all students. It is important that you act in ways that promote your mentee’s learning and improved practice while developing his/her professional autonomy. The goal is to develop a teacher who engages in the continual process of self-assessment.

Guidelines for Success as a Mentor

- **Schedule meetings** with your teacher frequently. In September you will meet with them twice a week (usually for an hour or so) and then at least once a week through the year thereafter. If you are visiting during class time or are observing the teacher, be sure to schedule time to “debrief,” to talk about what went well and what didn’t.

- **Maintain confidentiality.** As a mentor you are building a relationship of trust and mutual respect.

- Serve as a **role model** for the teacher.

- Conduct conferences designed to **increase the teacher’s self esteem** and feelings of comfort in the school.

- **Serve as a resource person** for the teacher.

- **Assist your mentee in developing relationships** with other faculty, staff, and community members.

- Give the teacher the **option to accept or reject your suggestions.**

- **Be flexible.**

- **Attend Mentor Meetings** if your school is lucky enough to provide ongoing professional development, i.e. training how to be a better mentor.
Possible Mentor/Teacher Pitfalls

- **Overprotection**: The mentor cannot shield the teacher from every possible mistake.

- **Mentor Inflexibility**: Permit the teacher to pick and choose from the advice and modeling offered.

- **Substandard Goals**: The mentee’s growth potential should not be based on the mentor’s limitations. If you feel you lack specific knowledge needed to support your mentee in a certain area, please utilize the wealth of resources you have at school to help you along. We are all lifelong learners!

- **Mentor Dominance**: Don’t bedazzle the teacher with personal skill and knowledge. As enthusiastic teachers ourselves, we mentors can tend to shower our mentees with our own ideas or lessons that we have used and loved. Mentors need to be careful of this as it robs the mentee of problem solving and being creative on his/her own. When parents do their child’s homework or projects for them it is basically telling the child that they are incapable. Bedazzling mentees can do the same and conflicts with our goal of teacher autonomy. Mentor ideas should be sprinkled around as needed but no need to deluge the mentee with our great knowledge!

- **Lack of Communication/No Communication**: It is important to communicate often and effectively with the teacher. For more information, see “Tools for Reflective Conversations,” starting on page 5.

- **Lack of Follow-Through**: Display task commitment and dedication to the process. Personally, I send articles, websites, books, and ideas for potential field trips, based on what I know my mentee is teaching at that moment.
Clarifying Expectations in Mentoring Relationships

**Step 1:** Get off to a good start by getting acquainted with one another’s interests, values, goals, teaching styles, professional experiences, etc.

**Step 2:** Take the time to clarify your own expectations and to understand the expectations of your mentee. This contributes to the establishment of a strong and positive mentoring relationship. **Some examples of expectations that might be discussed are:**

- The frequency of contact, the availability and the accessibility of the mentor and teacher
- Preferred method of contact—email, phone, etc.
- The amount and kind of support that are needed by the incoming teacher or that can be provided by the mentor
- The various roles the mentor finds comfortable: listener, supporter, advisor, guide, counselor, role model, friend, nurturer, or resource provider.

**Tools for Reflective Conversations**

- Empathetic Acceptance
- Paraphrasing
- Clarifying Questions
- Open-Ended Clarifying Questions

**Empathy**

“The way of being with another person which is termed empathetic... means temporarily living in their life, moving about it delicately, without making judgments... To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter the other’s world without prejudice... a complex, demanding, strong, yet subtle and gentle way of being.” – Carl Rogers
New teachers want someone to:

• Take their daily dilemmas seriously
• Watch them teach and provide feedback
• Help them develop instructional strategies
• Model skilled teaching
• Share insights about students’ work and lives

From Susan Moore Johnson & Susan M. Kardos, “Keeping New Teachers in Mind”
Educational Leadership (March 2002)

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing communicates that the listener has HEARD what the speaker said, UNDERSTOOD what was said, and CARES. Paraphrasing involves either RESTATING in your own words or SUMMARIZING.

Some possible paraphrasing stems include the following:

So, . . . In other words, . . . What you are saying is . . . From what I hear you say . . . I’m hearing many things . . .

Clarifying Questions

Clarifying questions help the new teacher:

• HYPOTHESIZE what might happen
• ANALYZE what worked or didn’t
• IMAGINE possibilities
•COMPARE & CONTRAST what was planned with what ensued
• EXTRAPOLATE from one situation to another
• EVALUATE the impact
Some clarifying question stems include:

What’s another way you might...? What would it look like if...?

What do you think would happen if...? How was ... different from (like)...? What is another way you might...? What sort of an impact do you think...? What criteria do you use to...? When have you done something like...before? What do you think...?

How did you decide...(come to that conclusion)? What might you see happening in your classroom if...?

Open-Ended Clarifying Questions

Sometimes mentors need to use questions to communicate that he/she has HEARD what the speaker said but does NOT fully understand what was said. This involves asking an open-ended question to:

1. Gather more information
2. Discover the meaning of language used
3. Get clarity about the speaker’s reasoning
4. Seek connections between ideas
5. Develop or maintain a focus

Some possible question stems include the following:

Would you tell me a little more about...? Let me see if I understand...

I’d be interested in hearing more about... It’d help me understand if you would give me an example of...

So, are you saying/suggesting...?

Tell me what you mean when you...

Tell me how that idea is like (different from)...

I’m intrigued by/interested in/wonder...

*NOTE: “Why?” questions tend to elicit defensive responses.
Praise

Alfie Kohn, in his book, *Punished by Rewards*, (1993) presents some rather significant insights regarding the use of praise. These include the following: that praise sets up a power imbalance between the giver and receiver of praise; that praise sets up and then perpetuates a dependence upon someone else’s judgments; that praise creates a judgmental environment where an individual is going to feel less free to make mistakes or take risks; that praise may seem condescending especially if it clashes with what the person already thinks of his/her performance.

**Praise: General Principles**

1. **Self-determination:**
   Are we helping the teacher make his/her own judgments about what constitutes good practice?

2. **Intrinsic Motivation:**
   Are we helping the teacher become more intrinsically motivated or will they continue doing the task just to win our approval?

3. **Intentionality:**
   Are we praising because it makes us feel good or so that the other person will like us more?

4. **Impact:**
   How do our comments sound to the person hearing them?


**A Few Reminders**

- Praise the task or behavior, not the person
- Make praise as specific as possible
- Praise sincerely and spontaneously.
- Make praise private.
The Path to Autonomy

The locus of control shifts from the mentor to the teacher as you move from directive responses to collaboration to non-directive responses and greater teacher autonomy.

**Autonomous teachers:**

- Assume responsibility for themselves, but also see themselves as part of the whole
- Are aware of and monitor their own behavior and thinking
- Are self-directed
- Take responsibility for their actions and their consequences
- Have empathy for multiple perspectives
- Seek more than one way to approach a problem (flexible)
- Are able to set their own outcomes and find ways to achieve those outcomes
- Have a continuing desire for growth and self-renewal
- Are not dependent upon others’ approval
Promoting Professional Growth

Simply establishing an area of focus for professional growth, choosing one or two elements, is very important. Although the focus may seem narrow given the broad array of issues of practice, research indicates that focused professional growth will move practice forward. If the teacher changes his/her practice in one or two element areas, it will almost automatically move practice forward in other areas. Focused growth in a defined area of practice builds a sense of efficacy. Research also demonstrates that a teacher’s sense of professional efficacy (the belief that they can make a difference) has a significant impact on their success and job satisfaction.

Classroom Observations as Tools for Growth

Three Types of Observations:

1. **Mentor observes the teacher** – This observation provides the teacher with feedback on his/her teaching, students, and/or classroom environment. Leave the teacher with one or two concrete things to work on.

2. **Mentee observes** a model lesson taught by the mentor.

3. **Co-observing another teacher** – This observation allows the teacher and mentor to choose a focus and then compare what they observe. Research says that often new teachers are not able to identify why a lesson is working, and having another set of eyes helps them focus on what is important or significant.
In a research study of mentoring programs in California (1996), beginning teachers stated that the observation process was essential to their professional growth and that it encouraged the process of reflection upon practice. Most teachers indicated a strong desire for more frequent observation.

**This study also found that three ingredients were essential for the observation process to be effective.**

1. A strong, trusting relationship between the teacher and the observer is crucial if the teacher is to perceive the observation process as contributing to professional growth.

2. The observation process should be integrated into a broader support program (not every visit is an observation).

3. The observation should have a specific focus to ensure maximum impact. Ask your mentee what behavior or skill they would like to get feedback on.

**Recording Evidence**

Four types of evidence:

1. **Verbatim scripting of the teacher or students** – writing down exactly what is being said. Example: “Take out your homework assignment and place it on your desk.”

2. **A non-evaluative statement of observed behavior** (teacher or student). Example: Students sit in groups of four.

3. **Numeric information** about time use, student participation, resource use, etc. Example: Five students raised their hands.

4. **An observed aspect of the environment.** Example: Procedures for group work are posted on the board.
Interactive Journaling

Ideally, teachers will briefly record their ideas and feelings in their journals, not only after being observed, but regularly at each day’s end. These journals can serve as talking points for meeting with their mentors. They also provide teachers with a valuable tool for their own self-assessment and reflection.

Possible verbal or written responses to journal entries include:

**Empathetic responses**

- That must be really frustrating . . .
- That’s a hard decision. There are several points of view to consider.
- I think I might feel hurt if that happened to me...

**Make connections to your own experiences**

- A similar thing happened to me, and I felt the same way when...
- In my experience . . .

**Make connections between ideas expressed**

- I noticed you first said . . . and then
- Oh, I see. If you...then...
- Many of the things you mentioned
- What’s the relationship between . . .
- You seem to...as well as...

**Summarize or paraphrase key ideas/feelings**

- You seem to be...

**Helping the teacher label what is being experienced or observed**

- What you seem to be experiencing is . . .
- The...you describe is...
Pose questions that promote and deepen thinking

• What do you think might happen if . . .?
• What do you think the students might do if . . .?
• Looking back over your entry (entries), what do you see as . . .?

Offer multiple suggestions when invited

• A couple of things I’ve tried in similar circumstances are . .

Use invitational language

• Something you might consider trying is . . .

Invite further thinking by posing a question along with a suggestion

• Sometimes it’s helpful if . . . How do you think/imagine that might work in your situation?

If the writer expressly asks for ideas, you have been given permission to pose solutions. A good rule of thumb is to describe 2-3 different ideas without ownership or attachment to them. Trust that if an idea will work, the individual will recognize and use it.

*Avoid feeling obliged to “fix” the situation.*

Conclusion

Teacher mentors are an invaluable piece of the intricate puzzle that is behind the education of every child. The quality of the mentor/teacher relationship will be reflected in the classroom and ultimately in the attitudes and performance of each individual student. With patience and dedication, mentors can expect to experience great satisfaction as they watch their mentees develop into autonomous, effective professionals.