



Just ASK Publications & Professional Development

Mentoring in the 21st Century

Issue IX

by Paula Rutherford

This newsletter provides advice, insights, and suggestions helpful to mentors and induction program coordinators as they strive to support new teachers. Also included are timely instructional tips mentors can share with new teachers. This month's issue focuses on getting feedback from new teachers about how well the mentoring program worked for them.

Just ASK the New Teachers!

As the school year draws to a close it is time to step back and reflect on our mentoring efforts this past year. The best source of feedback we have at our disposal is the work of our protégés. If they have made strong initial steps toward becoming fully qualified teachers and contributing members of the school community and are pleased with the results of their efforts then we can pat ourselves on the back and say, "Well done!"

Even if our protégés have had a successful first year in our schools, we need to be thinking now about how to make our mentoring efforts even more effective and efficient next year. A Likert Scale questionnaire on which respondents are asked to indicate levels of agreement or disagreement with statements can yield results useful in reporting to the district or the state. Such an instrument will not, however, provide the information you really want to know: what to do next year. The best way to obtain information that can help us individually and collectively grow as mentors is to ask the new teachers what helped them succeed, what they valued most, and what they wish there had been more or less of. In this issue, I offer some questions for your consideration as you meet with your protégé to gain insight into their thinking about how well the mentoring program worked for them and how it might be improved. There are far too many questions to ask at one time so identify the ones of most interest to you. Either embed them into multiple conversations as you wrap up the school year or, better yet, take your protégé out for a drink to celebrate a successful first year.

Introduction to the Mentoring Program

- What do you recall about how you were introduced to the induction and mentoring program and to your mentor?
- Is there anything else we might have done to make those initial contacts more beneficial to you?
- How did your mentor make you feel welcome and a part of the school community?

Communication Channels with Mentor

- What possibilities for mentoring interactions were offered to you?
- Which ones did you find most useful and why?
- What other communication channels would have improved the flow of information and support?

Formal Structures and Goal Setting

- What structures and program expectations provided the strongest scaffolding for your relationship with your mentor?

- Were there program expectations that at times seemed overwhelming?
Did that feeling dissipate over time?
- If you were in charge of planning the mentoring program for next school year what structures and expectations would you keep, change, omit, or add?

Materials and Resource Acquisition

- Did you have all the materials and resources you needed to start the year and to do high quality work throughout the year? If not, what resources were you lacking?
- How was your mentor involved in supporting you in this arena?

Emphasis on Teaching and Learning in a Standards-Based Environment

- Describe how we helped you access, analyze, and use the district curriculum documents and pacing guides.
- How did we do in helping you develop your repertoire of instructional strategies?
- What do you know about formative assessment now that you did not know at the beginning of the year?
What role did mentor support play in helping you build expertise with classroom assessment?
- Did you hear conflicting messages about covering the material and ensuring student learning of key concepts and essential understandings? If so, how did that impact your instructional decision making? What might we do to minimize such conflicting messages?

Looking at and Using Student Work to Inform Instructional Decision-Making

- How did you and your mentor go about looking at student work?
- What types of student work did you examine and how frequently did you do so?
- Describe a time when you gained insight from the conversations you had with your mentor about the quality of the student work and its match to district learning standards and curriculum.

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

- In what ways did you receive support in working with advanced learners, struggling learners, special needs learners, and second language learners?
- How did your interactions with special education, literacy, and second language specialists go? (If the new teacher is a specialist, ask about interactions with general education teachers.)
- What mentoring support helped/would have helped in this area?
- Describe the support you needed and received when dealing with resistant learners?

Organizational Systems

- How did you go about organizing, and reorganizing, your professional and instructional materials, the classroom, and the students?
- What will you do differently next year?
- What, if anything, might we have suggested that would have alleviated some of the stress caused by the incredible amount of paperwork?

A Culture of Mentoring

- When asked by someone outside our school, how would you describe the mentoring culture present here?
- Who were the people who stepped forward to assist you and what did they do?
- Were grade-level, departmental, and team meetings learning opportunities for you?
- Were you encouraged to contribute your ideas and applauded for your good suggestions? Did you ever feel like too many people were providing too many suggestions? If so, how might we continue to provide strong support without overdoing it?
- How did the supervision and evaluation process promote your professional growth?

Professional Development Opportunities

- What professional development opportunities did you participate in? How did what you learned impact your professional practice?
- What do you think were the most important professional development opportunities for you?
- What professional development opportunities do you think will be important for you during your second year?

Parents as Partners

- What do you remember about Back-to-School Night and the first round of parent conferences? How did your mentor help you prepare for those events?
- Describe some ways in which your mentor helped you plan for or debrief parent conferences, especially difficult ones.

If You Were in Charge

- If you can give me/us three pieces of advice as we plan for the induction and mentoring program for next year, what would you suggest?

Please be sure to find the time before the school year ends to have a conversation with your protégés about these issues. Richard Ingersoll wrote in his landmark 2001 report: **Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools** that in addition to the low salaries and challenging students, many new teachers do not continue to teach because they do not feel a part of the larger organization and want “enhanced faculty input into school decision-making.” Asking new staff for their opinions is a step in the right direction. Taking action on their collective suggestions is, of course, the next important step.

Let me know what you learn.

You will find **Induction and Mentoring Program Reflection and Evaluation** templates in *The 21st Century Mentor’s Handbook*. The template for new teachers is on pages 277-280 and the companion template for mentors can be found on pages 296-299.

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