



Mentoring in the 21st Century

Issue XV

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. The focus this month is on publicizing and promoting the power of mentoring.

Making Mentoring Matter

School districts across the country are beginning to plan mentoring and induction programs for the new school year. Given that most districts are facing unusually tight budget constraints and professional development programs are often one of the first areas cut, it is essential that we work together to publicize the power of our mentoring programs. Mentors must be seen by all players as an indispensable part of the team that promotes high levels of student learning. Each of us needs to be proactive in making sure that our work is highly visible and valued.

Keep the decision makers in the loop.

For starters, we need to be sure that the decision makers are aware of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what we see as the results. In larger districts it is possible that those sitting at the budget table have no idea about the scope of the work, the incredible commitment individual mentors make to the success of new teachers, and the impact it has on new teacher retention and increased student learning. Given the scope of their own work, the chances are good that the district leaders have not had the time to read the latest literature on mentoring and induction so may not realize the significance of such work. Provide them with brief, clear descriptions about the accomplishments of your mentoring program, short summaries of journal articles related to the power of mentoring, and always invite them to attend support sessions and celebrations.

Promote the alignment of the processes.

In some districts there is little alignment of processes or even goals of departments. One of the most efficient ways to cut costs not only in terms of money but also of time and energy is to align the processes. In order to accomplish as much as possible and to clearly communicate the crucial role of mentoring and induction programs, we need to do all we can to promote better alignment between the:

- Strategic plan
- Interviewing and hiring process
- Mentoring and induction program
- Professional development at the district, school, and team levels
- Faculty, department and team meeting agendas
- Supervision and evaluation process
- Professional growth plans
- School improvement plans

It may seem from your perspective that you have little influence on such alignment but the reality is that if each of us takes action to promote alignment, we can make a difference. That is what teams do. Ways you can promote alignment include:

- Appropriately question the status quo
- Purposefully reach out to those charged with leading/working on other processes and point out or seek connections
- Organize the New Teacher Handbook by the performance categories used in the supervision and evaluation process
- Make explicit connections between professional development offerings and the supervision and evaluation standards
- Keep mentoring on the front burner at faculty, department, and team meetings
- Use a Mentoring Team approach
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- Chat with colleagues in HR about what you see as important characteristics of successful new teachers and about the questions they are asking in interviews
- Invite your HR colleagues to sit in on some mentoring interactions or to attend professional development events focused on best practice in teaching and learning

Our role in promoting this alignment is legitimized when we ensure that our mentoring work is seen by all players as part of a comprehensive induction program. The Alliance for Excellent Education (all4ed.org) identifies mentoring, common planning time, collaboration, professional development, and standards-based evaluation as critical components of such induction programs. Our work is enhanced when it is seen as a part of a bigger initiative designed to promote professional growth and student learning and is less likely to be subject to budget cuts.

Provide the numbers.

The score board tells us that it is far more economical to provide high quality mentoring programs than it is to recruit and hire new teachers. While we know that intuitively, be sure that all who should have this information know to access the Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator and run the numbers. The results are staggering.

Administer and disseminate results of program evaluations.

Begin with the end in mind and design program evaluations that focus on desired program outcomes. If you did not design and distribute a program evaluation at the beginning of the school year, design it now. Use program outcomes and the teacher performance standards as design guidelines. While information obtained using a Likert Scale is efficient to score and can reveal patterns and trends, ask respondents to provide evidence for at least some of their opinions. Also consider having new teachers and mentors respond to the same stems and compare the results.

If you are not in a position to administer a formal program evaluation, there are other ways to gather data about the effectiveness of the mentoring program.

Whether you use a formal system-wide evaluation or a more informal evaluation, once you have collected and analyzed the data, be sure that decision makers and colleagues see the results.

We will all be winners... especially our students!

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