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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