



STRATEGY BRIEF:

Training and Supporting Mentors

Local education agency (LEA) and school leaders can use this brief to learn more about:

- Effective practices they can use to train and support mentors;
- Examples from other schools that have implemented strategies to address this challenge; and
- Resources to support this work in your LEA.

To learn more about mentoring generally, see the Induction Guide.

Context

Even the best-prepared novice teachers face challenges in their first years; by supporting novice teachers in these challenges, mentors help improve outcomes for both teachers and their students. To do this effectively, mentors need the time and training to support new teachers. With high-quality standards, protected time, and training, mentors can provide these supports to new teachers and, in turn, create the effective classrooms that all students deserve.

One requirement of the Pennsylvania Educator Induction Plan Guidelines is that mentors are a part of the educator induction team and have relationships with inductees. According to the guidelines, “Mentors are those educators recognized for instructional leadership and their ability to work collaboratively on development of job-embedded knowledge and skills. Being a mentor is an honor and mentoring provides the opportunity for leadership. Mentors also gain from the experience that refines their skills and enhances professional growth.

How can LEA policies and practices be more effective?

Step 1: Align mentor support with mentor standards.

The LEA should adopt and use professional learning standards for mentors that describe the knowledge, skills, abilities and dispositions that mentors must have to advance beginning teachers' professional practice and impact student learning. Standards reflect a continuum of mentor development and can be used to guide mentor professional learning. The New Teacher Center's Mentor Practice Standards are one example of these.

Step 2: Provide initial training to mentors.

Though mentors bring experience to the role, they often require additional support to fulfill the requirements of their positions, and supports from the LEA can sometimes fall short. For example, in many districts, new mentors receive a one-time, initial training on their responsibilities as mentors. The topics of focus for their professional learning are sometimes chosen without regard to mentor needs, standards for mentors are not always used, and often mentors are expected to already be experts in mentoring because they were exemplary teachers. However, mentoring a beginning teacher is different from teaching students. New mentors require more support than a one-time training.

Comprehensive mentor support should include the following:¹

Professional learning standards for mentors that describe the knowledge, skills, abilities and dispositions that mentors must have to develop beginning teachers' skills; standards reflect a continuum of mentor development and can be used to guide mentor professional learning

- The example Mentor Practice Standards provided by the New Teacher Center can be useful starting points

Professional learning opportunities that are carefully sequenced and differentiated to meet the needs of mentors to help them grow in their role, learn new mentoring strategies, and reflect on practice

Ongoing formative assessment, coaching, and goal-setting processes that parallel those of beginning teachers

¹ For more information see the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders' handout, A New Vision for Mentor Professional Learning, Development, and Assessment.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION:



To prepare mentors for their responsibilities, Boston Public Schools offers extensive professional learning opportunities, including the Boston Public Schools' Mentor Training Course, which includes 36 hours of training focused on the role of the mentor, communication style, differential conferencing, developing beginning teachers' planning skills, advocacy, monthly action planning, influencing the belief systems of beginning teachers, the role of mentors in comprehensive induction programs, and working with administrators and mentor leaders.

Des Moines School District in Iowa provides mentors with 30 hours of training supports during the initial year of mentoring as well as follow-up in Years 2 and 4. The training includes an overview of the "mentor role" and the purpose of a mentoring program; time to develop and refine skills in coaching, consulting, and collaboration; and time to develop and refine knowledge and skills in:

- effective teaching, classroom management, adult learning, and classroom observation;
- reflective questioning and providing effective feedback;
- guiding and supporting beginning teachers, both personally and professionally;
- district expectations for all teachers;
- developing the new teacher as a researcher and reflective practitioner; and
- development and use of a common language to articulate and apply appropriate instructional and classroom management techniques (e.g., diagnosing student needs, lesson design, motivating students to learn, learning styles, problem-solving techniques, alternative instructional strategies, assessment of student learning, planning and time management).

Resource: *Mentoring New Teachers*, a free online resource from the National Education Association, can serve as a starting place for developing professional learning for mentors of new teachers. The three modules in the online tool cover how to build trust with a new teacher, how to respond to diverse learners, and how to become a better mentor. Each module includes three lessons with multimedia resources.

Reflection questions:

- *What current training do new mentors receive?*
- *How will that training be refined to align with best practices?*

Step 3: Create structures for ongoing support to mentors.

Professional learning opportunities for mentors should be carefully sequenced and differentiated to meet the needs of mentors. These professional learning opportunities are times when mentors can acquire critical skills to initiate and maintain effective mentoring relationships with beginning teachers. Additional support for mentors could include mentor professional learning communities, where mentors learn new content, gather to share strategies, and reflect on practice. Finally, mentors should receive ongoing coaching and formative assessment. During this process, mentors are observed and given formative feedback as they collaborate with beginning teachers and later meet with a coach to think through opportunities for growth and areas of strength.

Reflection questions:

- *What ongoing support do mentors already receive?*
- *Is there any informal support that can be formalized?*
- *How will mentor needs be measured to prioritize ongoing supports?*

Step 4: Ensure that ongoing professional learning addresses essential content.

Mentors need opportunities to connect with new content and engage with their colleagues in applying that content to practice. Essential content for mentor professional learning² includes the following:

- Common needs of new teachers and implications for the mentor role
- Roles and responsibilities of participants in the mentoring program (mentors, new teachers, administrators, and other colleagues)
- How mentors will track, describe and report their mentoring activities

² Dunne, K., & Villani, S. (2007). Mentoring new teachers through collaborative coaching: Linking student and teacher learning. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

- Communication and collaboration skills
- Cultural competence
- Coaching and observation approaches
- Frameworks to evaluate teaching, learning and assessing

Reflection questions:

- *What ongoing support is provided to mentors already?*
- *What data is collected or could be collected to assess mentor needs?*



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