

Contents

Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Part I: The Promise	1
The Promise of Mentoring.....	1
Where Do We Begin?	4
What Do We Do Next?	8
You Get (More Than) What You Pay For	13
Choosing the Right Mentors	17
Part II: The Challenge	22
Training Mentors To Be Effective Observers	22
Training Mentors To Be Good Coaches	28
Matching Mentors With Their Colleagues	33
How Are We Doing?	36
Epilogue	41
Bibliography	43

Part 1

The Promise

The Promise of Mentoring

You've heard the predictions. In the first decade of the 21st century, schools will need about 2.5 million new teachers. For most of us that prediction is a curious oddity, like a Jeanne Dixon forecast that is fun to ponder but has little to do with our own lives. As you look around your school buildings, though, it's not that 2.5 million needed teachers with which you're concerned but rather the 75% of the history department and the entire middle school science staff at your school who have 25 or more years in education. Their ears perk up when early retirement is discussed. Many of them will retire in the next few years and, especially in areas like science, math, and special education, schools will be competing with one another to entice the best and brightest of the new teachers to their classrooms.

You may have heard the other numbers, too. Between 30% and 50% of new teachers leave within the first three to seven years in the profession (Huling-Austin, 1989). Some of these folks change careers because they probably should not have become teachers in the first place. However, education is not just losing those teachers who "sneaked by" their colleges of education, but it is losing those same best and brightest whom educators wanted to attract in the

first place (Ganser, 1997). In an urban school or a high-poverty district, the brain drain of losing teachers is even greater. In recent years in both the Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, Municipal School Districts, for instance, approximately one-third of teachers left before their first year ended, some of them walking out of class one day and simply not returning, leaving district administrators scrambling to find replacements.

If all that sounds disconcerting or worrisome, it should be. These reflect major obstacles to having a competent and caring teacher in every child's classroom. With any set of obstacles, however, there is a promise, and that promise comes with a strong mentoring program that can be used to induct new teachers into the profession. To do that, however, we as educators must act to change the climate into which many of us walked when we began as teachers. Darling-Hammond calls it the "sink-or-swim" realities of the traditional way in which new teachers are welcomed into the profession. A strong, well-planned, and well-executed mentoring program is one factor that can make a difference in attracting highly qualified new teachers and, just as important, retaining them after they become skillful teachers and treasured colleagues.

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High-quality mentoring programs have benefits for the districts that nurture them, the mentors who lead them, and the new teachers who participate in them. For districts, a mentoring program may be one factor considered by new teachers as they are deciding among job offers. Certainly, mentoring has been shown to increase retention—to as much as 93% in the case of

California (Schultz, 1999). For mentors, it is an opportunity to give back to the profession in which they have invested so much and to gain the satisfaction of starting a new colleague on the right path. For new teachers, participating in a mentoring program can speed their developmental process from considering their teaching in light of what they do to evaluating their success in terms of how their students achieve.

The challenge, then, is to design a program that is just that—strong, well-planned, and well-executed. This book introduces the characteristics of successful mentoring programs (Dagenais, 1996). It considers setting the scope of a program, selecting and matching mentors, establishing mentor incentives, training mentors, and designing the formative and summative evaluations needed to strengthen the program for the benefit of all those involved. Although there are many other potential issues to consider, such as the survival needs of new teachers, specific processes and protocols for mentoring programs to follow, and so on, this book is intended to equip a staff developer, administrator, or teacher with information and tools to use as they begin to plan a mentoring program or as they look at the components of an existing program.

Where Do We Begin?...

With an Advisory Council

Starting a mentoring program is a challenge, and it is a challenge that one individual cannot do alone. Although individuals will take leadership roles in order for the program to be effectively designed and competently run, the responsibilities for a successful mentoring program need to be shared by many. Because mentoring programs change the way in which the induction of new teachers takes place within a school and district, there are many parties that will want to be at the table as a new program is designed. At minimum, it is wise to have representatives from administration, the local teachers' association, and several teachers who are likely to take on the role of mentors.

Administrative Support

Mentoring programs do not have a chance for success without the support of administrators, both central office and, especially, principals.

Mentoring programs do not have a chance for success without the support of administrators, both central office and, especially, principals. Central office administration, most often human resources supervisors and/or, in smaller districts, superintendents or assistant superintendents, provide an important leadership role in both creating and sustaining the program. They are in a position to be most aware of demographic shifts in the community that may require the hiring of new teachers, of impending retirements or buy-outs that may have the same effect, and of new legislative initiatives that impact on the profession. They also have