A Principal’s Plan for Mentoring Novice Teachers
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The successful mentoring of first-, second-, and third-year teachers is imperative for both retention and the continued success of students in the public school setting. Implementation of effective teacher mentor programs is vitally important to a teacher’s professional success and can have positive impacts on student achievement and staff morale. The following suggestions can be modified and implemented into any school setting and have proved effective in both elementary and middle school settings in North Carolina.

Mentoring must begin prior to the teachers arriving on campus each fall. Begin with the creation of a panel that comprises seasoned veterans and excited teachers who volunteer to work on a support committee. You do not want to force anyone to serve on this team, as the negative energy can be more of a problem and less of the solution. Meet with one another, come up with a plan, develop a budget, outline your entire year, and let the learning begin.

If you cannot serve as the primary lead mentor, make sure you have a significant role in some capacity. An administrator can assist in many different ways. The principal or assistant principal can plan and share one or two staff development sessions, if not more. Principals can gain respect by letting new teachers see how they themselves deliver instruction, teaching with the same high expectations you will hold them accountable for in the future. In addition, as administrators take on an active role in assuring that novice teachers are valued and appreciated, it will set a tone for the school that the majority of faculty will follow. You will show others how beginning teachers are to be supported and treated on a regular basis.

Get ready to be a public servant. Block off one or two teacher workdays and roll up your sleeves. Assign each beginning teacher an hour of your time. Offer your services to help get rooms prepared. Hang up posters, sweep the floors, organize bookshelves, or do whatever it takes. Have teachers create a to-do list for you. That will take some of the pressure off of them assigning you random tasks once you’re standing at their door. Repeat this activity at the end of grading periods or semesters when necessary and feasible. If the task is too burdensome, recruit some help. Request that mentors, assistant principals, or parent volunteers help out.

Survey your beginning teachers to find out what their needs are for staff development. Keep the staff development sessions brief, and meet at a time that is convenient for your teachers. Give your beginning teachers a voice and let them help with the planning of staff development. Topics such as classroom management and successful teaching strategies are mandatory, but offer flexibility with the other selections. Certain sessions could focus on invitational classrooms, successful parent communication, positive attitudes in the workplace, writing grants, or pursuing higher education.

Help ease the pressure. Right before report cards are due, if not sooner, your beginning teachers may be feeling overwhelmed with grades and paperwork. Distribute a coupon to your teachers weeks prior to the assigned target date. Explain that you are willing to grade an identified number of papers for each teacher. Ask for an answer key and indicate that there is great beauty in simplicity (no essays or projects). Some teachers will take you up on this and others will pass. However, it continues to send the strong message that beginning teachers are valued and the administration will do whatever is necessary to make them successful and, in turn, do what is best for each individual child.

At the end of the year, take your beginning teachers off campus for a day of staff development, reflection, and rejuvenation. Build your off-campus day around staff development that focuses on teacher leadership, empowerment, professional reflection, and true encouragement of the heart. Prepare teacher baskets with items that are needed for any good classroom (e.g., hand sanitizer, air freshener, art supplies, as well as the day’s agenda. Start the day approximately 30 minutes later than your typical school day and plan to end an hour early.

Plan your staff development to showcase things you want to see in your classrooms such as cooperative groups, movement, and positive, genuine feedback. Pay for their lunches and give them the hour they deserve, yet never get when teaching students. End the day with a personal note for each participant from the administration that recognizes the tough job teachers have. Express your sincere appreciation and recognize all of the individual contributions your teachers have made. Encourage them as they successfully complete their beginning years of teaching and offer assistance in the coming years. When time allows, a note from several students that you have gathered prior to the day is a great ending activity, too.

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