

Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

Name & Position: Cynthia Schonagel, Assistant for ELL and Teacher Support

Email: HYPERLINK "<mailto:cschonagel@chicopee.mec.edu>"
cschonagel@chicopee.mec.edu **Phone:** (413) 594-1590

Lever Addressed: Induction

Title of Promising Practice: Mentoring Program

District(s) Where Implemented: Chicopee Public Schools

Applicable Grade Levels: K- 12

How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:

Chicopee Public Schools is committed to retaining highly qualified teachers to insure every student performs at high levels. Leaders see a correlation between highly qualified teachers and high student performance so there is a strong focus on supporting new teachers to best insure optimal educator performance.

The Mentoring Program, at the heart of new teacher support in Chicopee, has always been strong. Surveys are continually run to ask new teachers what their needs are ahead of time and programmatic and informal support is geared to include feedback received. Building relationships is core to the program. Open communication and building trust are seen as foundational to good collegial relationships.

Goals of This Practice:

The goal of the Mentoring Program is to support new teachers. Research suggests a direct correlation between retention and meeting the needs of new teachers in an ongoing, sustained way. New teachers gain support from administration, department and non-department colleagues, but the mentoring relationship has the unique quality of being a confidential relationship where judgments are discouraged and the safety provided allows teachers to open up and share their vulnerabilities. The mentor-mentee relationship is a "safe haven" in which teachers can take risks, thrive and grow.

Description of This Practice:

Mentor Training: This is offered annually, in the fall. In addition to formal training in mentoring skills, new mentors meet with a panel of veteran mentors to learn from those with experience in the role. Additional Professional Development opportunities relating to Mentoring are offered over the course of the year.

Recruiting Mentors: Eligible teachers apply to be mentors and the Assistant for ELL and Teacher Support, with input from building administrators, makes the final decisions regarding who will mentor and what matches will be made. Administration publicizes and promotes the Mentoring Program to encourage teachers to be mentors. Building administrators are enthusiastic about the program and about supporting mentors. The Assistant for ELL and Teacher Support oversees the program.

Matching: Administrators try to arrange matches by grade, content area, and building, although these exact correlations are not always possible. The Assistant for ELL and Teacher Support does the matching, after close consultation with building principals and assistant principals.

Differentiated Preparation: A unique feature of the district's Mentoring Program is its differentiated approach in the training. For example, mentors supporting teachers in the areas of CTE, ELL, and Special Education are given specialized instruction in these teaching areas so that when they are matched with new teachers they have a working knowledge that is specially targeted. This equips them to address issues and questions in a more informed way.

Chicopee has historically run its own Mentor Training. Last year, the district contracted to train mentors through PROJECT SUCCESS. Project Success has a dual focus – one is to train teachers to mentor and the other is to train these same teachers to be lead mentors, i.e. mentors who will do in-house training once they have completed the course. The lead mentors are provided with mentor manuals and other resources, which they use to support teachers.

Beyond the initial training meeting, mentors meet twice in the course of the year – spring and fall, along with Project Success trained lead mentors.

The mentors make themselves available to meet with new teachers during the summer, to help anticipate and get ready for the school year, and hopefully reduce related stress.

Year 1: The first year is focused on everything a new teacher needs. At the start of the year there is a formal New Teacher Orientation for all new teachers (focus on nuts and bolts items such as credit union, CEA Union, Kelly Services, Technology Use, etc.) Beyond this, mentors and mentees meet throughout the year for informal mentoring and they may observe each other's classes. Mentors are paid for 30 hours of mentoring in the first year. Mentoring relationships and topics vary and take different forms depending on the new teacher's needs, and also what the mentor considers would be useful and instructive for his/her mentee.

There are five additional meetings offered to new teachers and the content of these meetings is driven by teacher feedback gathered through surveys administered annually. Topics covered in these meetings include: Common Core Review, Licensure, Special Needs Programs and Services, etc. Teachers are given a combination of training, articles and resources at these meetings. Parts of these five meetings are

devoted to new educator reflection on their successes and challenges. Mentors are invited to attend these meetings with their mentees. Teachers in their second year are welcome to attend these meetings if they feel they could benefit and teachers rated as non-proficient are encouraged to attend.

Year 2: The focus is reflection on the learning from the first year, as well as moving forward. Mentors and mentees continue to meet regularly, and mentors are paid for 50 hours of mentoring over the school year. Teachers work on their Portfolios with their mentors' guidance. There is a different feel to the relationship in this phase – more in-depth reflective exploration.

The district's enrollment of teachers in Project Success has shown how the addition of focused mentoring (i.e. Special Education, ELL and CTE) can augment the mentor program. In addition to receiving training in Project Success mentoring, teachers have access to and receive additional resources. Data is collected from mentors regarding what helped prepare them for the role and this information informs future training.

Criteria for This Particular Lever Most Exemplified in This Practice:

All members of the district and school community share collective responsibility for contributing to novice teacher growth.

Provision for professional growth of novice teachers is an integral part of the school district's professional development plan for all educators.

Professional development is specialized and developmentally appropriate.

Programs are differentiated to address educators' specific areas of responsibility and levels of experience.

Mentoring Programs are provided with the administrative supports and resources necessary.

The selection, training and responsibilities for mentors are informed by research.

Time for mentoring novice teachers is an integral part of the instructional day and provided opportunities for observation, consultation and reflection.

The District Induction Plan includes a process for collecting program data and conducting ongoing formative evaluation and regular summative evaluation of program effectiveness.

How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than Others Used:

Any changes made to the programs that support new teachers are based on data about how the programs are working, and not for the sake of making changes. One important change in how new teachers are supported is in the targeted training that is being given on different specializations at all grade levels. This is in addition to the core mentor training offered. New teachers (that is, in Special Education, ELL and CTE) find this approach practical and useful. They benefit from both mentor programs.

Project Success graduates add a new dimension to the Mentoring Program. They are specially trained to support other mentors in the form of consultation and resources. Mentors across the district are connected via a master list that identifies mentors, building assignments and areas of expertise and certification. This is obviously a source of support for all mentors.

How This Practice Has Changed The District:

Measures are:

- 1) Data from pre-and post- surveys of new teachers helps future planning to make the program as effective as possible.
- 2) Teacher retention data reflects a high retention of strong teachers.
- 3) Proficient rating of new teachers on the New Teacher Evaluation System.
- 4) Student achievement trends are good.

The district has a high teacher retention rate and believes the Mentoring Program is a significant piece in making this happen. Newly trained Project Success Mentors are assisting the Assistant for ELL and Teacher Support to enhance the Mentor Program so it better matches and serves newly hired teachers in so-called low incidence specialties such as ELL, School adjustment counseling, speech and occupational therapy, Special Education and CTE.

12. Resources (time, money, materials etc.) Required For Successful Implementation:

Stipended Positions:

Lead Mentors: 40 hours of service

Mentors: 30 hours in Year 1 and Fifty hours in Year 2

Supplies and meeting materials \$2,000

Books: Mentoring in Action (\$43.99) , First Year Matters (\$33.99)

Tools Used to Implement or Advance This Practice (surveys, needs assessments, technology tools, rubrics, feedback Forms etc.)

Books: *Mentoring in Action*, *First year Matters*, *Why Didn't I Learn this in College*, *The 21st Century Mentors Handbook*