THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT *of* EDUCATION

Establishing High-Quality Professional Development

Creating a Teacher Mentoring Program

The Usefulness of Mentoring

Imagine that you aspire to be a mountaineer. You have a new pair of boots, a tent, a backpack, and endless enthusiasm, but you have never so much as climbed above the tree line.

"There are two ways to get into it," observes Kenneth Wilson, a Nobel-laureate physicist at The Ohio State University, co-author of *Redesigning Education*, and a member of NFIE's board of directors. "You could take a practice run with somebody who has lots of experience and the ability to share it. The other way is to be taken to the base of Everest, dropped off, and told to get to the top or quit. If you don't make it, your enthusiasm disappears, and you seek ways to avoid similar challenges in the future."

Too often beginning teachers find themselves alone at the bottom of the world's tallest mountain. Tom Ganser, the director of field experiences at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and a nationally recognized expert on mentoring programs, listens carefully to how novice teachers describe their early experiences on the job. One, for example, compares the first year to "climbing a mountain that is cloud-covered. You can't see very far ahead, and you don't know how high the mountain is." Another describes it as "a journey for which there is no map to guide you."

Increasingly, school districts are working with teacher associations, universities, and others to establish mentoring programs to help beginning teachers, veteran teachers in new assignments, and teachers in need of remedial aid to build up to the difficult climbs with the assistance of a guide. The hope is that in due time the profession as a whole will be able to tackle the Everests of the educational landscape.

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About NFIE

THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT *of* EDUCATION

NFIE empowers public education employees to innovate, take risks, and become agents for change to improve teaching and learning in our society. As the foundation of the National Education Association, NFIE believes that all students can learn and that quality education begins with teachers.

NFIE's work is rooted in the belief that teachers' professional development is a cornerstone of reforms that heighten student achievement. The foundation helps teachers to take responsibility for the quality of the profession, play a leadership role in the development of research and policy affecting public education, and acquire skills, knowledge, and experience in ways that contribute to student success.

This paper outlines many of the issues and questions that school districts, teacher associations, and universities should consider when developing new or improving existing mentor programs. These questions and issues reflect the experiences and observations of teachers (both mentors and protégés, active and retired), district administrators, higher education faculty, and teacher association leaders who possess first-hand knowledge about what to seek and what to avoid when creating a mentor program. The paper is based on the proceedings of NFIE's Teacher Mentoring Symposium, co-hosted with United Teachers Los Angeles in February 1999. One of a series, the symposium formed an important part of *A Change of Course*, NFIE's ongoing effort to improve the quality and availability of professional development for public school teachers nationwide.

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Georgia Archibald, a retired teacher from Missouri, defines mentoring as a process that opens the doors to the school community and helps new faculty find the wisdom of all the teachers in the building. California teacher Lynette Henley characterizes mentoring as "going next door to that new person and saying, 'What can I do for you?'" Her retired colleague Ellen Logue adds: "A mentor helps teachers make sense of the realities that they face in teaching, learn their significance, and use what they have learned to improve their teaching skills." Ideally, mentoring helps to ensure that new teachers have access to the accumulated instructional knowledge and expertise of their colleagues in ways that contribute to student success. In this formulation, mentoring is a mechanism to articulate and share the genius of teaching.

Teacher mentoring programs have been around for about a generation. More than half the states in the country now require mentoring for entry-level teachers.[1] School districts, moreover, are beginning to realize that the veteran third-grade teacher who is suddenly reassigned to middle grades social studies may need the help of her colleagues every bit as much as the brand-new teacher who is fresh out of graduate school.

Demographic and policy trends now lend greater importance to mentoring programs than perhaps at any other time in recent memory. Increasing student enrollments, an escalation of teacher retirements, and the popularity of class-size reduction efforts in many states represent serious challenges to districts seeking to ensure the quality of classroom instruction. Concerted action must be taken to assist the anticipated two million new teachers who will enter the profession within the next decade and uncounted numbers of experienced teachers who will assume new assignments. In a *New York Times* column ("Dueling Goals for Education," April 7, 1999), Teachers College President Arthur Levine observes that policymakers are concurrently seeking to raise teaching standards and expand the ranks of the profession, both at a time when the pool of very experienced teachers is growing noticeably smaller. While not the entire solution, carefully designed mentoring programs can help in three ways to meet the challenge inherent in pursuing both of these worthy goals simultaneously: Mentoring can be used as a recruitment tool; it can improve teacher retention rates; and it can help to improve the skills and knowledge of both new and veteran teachers. Mentoring holds the potential to help the entire profession of teaching to advance with time, just as mountaineers (and physicists) learned to conquer challenges that in years past appeared well beyond their reach.

Recruitment and Retention—

Janet Gatti, assistant superintendent for the Mt. Diablo Unified School District in Concord, California, observes that graduating teacher education students are now asking, "What will you do to support us?" This, she says, "is a good reflective question. What *do* we do?" Tom Ganser adds, "In fact, I know that the new teachers I work with at my university are asking questions about mentoring and induction programs during their job interviews. . . . They view this as one of the things to take into consideration in terms of selecting a particular school." Such observations are admittedly anecdotal but do suggest that school districts might consider mentoring as a strategy for attracting the very best candidates.

Mentoring also helps to keep talented teachers on the job. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 9.3 percent of new teachers leave the profession after only a year (1994–95 data). An additional 11.1 percent leave their assignments for teaching positions elsewhere after their first year. In rural areas and inner cities, these rates are often dramatically higher. By contrast, in the Armstrong Atlantic State University branch of the celebrated Pathways to Teaching Careers Program, of which mentoring is a major component, the retention rate was a stunning 100 percent for the four years ending June 1999. Most of the teachers in the Armstrong

[1] Sharon Feiman-Nemser. *Teacher Mentoring: A Critical Review.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1998.

Atlantic program work in very challenging urban assignments in Savannah, Georgia. Similarly, a mentoring program in Columbus, Ohio, has resulted in lower attrition rates than those in comparable urban school districts.[2]

Improving Skills and Knowledge—

Evidence strongly suggests that mentoring improves the quality of teaching. More than a dozen teachers in the Savannah Pathways Program have received teaching awards from Sallie Mae and other organizations. Since 1986, the Columbus program has reduced by nearly 50 percent the number of teachers who require remedial intervention. In its January 1999 *Teacher Quality* study, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that seven in ten teachers who receive mentoring at least once a week believe that their instructional skills have improved "a lot" as a result.

A majority of those teachers who *provided* mentoring assistance at least once a week also reported substantial improvements to their practice. Donnis Deever, a retired teacher from Arizona and one of the architects of the Glendale Union High School District's award-winning mentoring program, explains: "I think all of us who were mentors changed radically. . . . Our classroom management skills changed. The way we related to other teachers in our area changed. The skills that we had to work with students in our classroom changed."

That said, teacher mentoring is no panacea and may involve certain unwanted side effects. A one- or two-year mentoring experience will not provide a new teacher with the full range of subject-matter knowledge necessary to be successful on the job. Mark Jones of the National Education Association's Alaska affiliate notes: "If a teacher doesn't have a grasp of the content area . . . , there is no way a mentor will overcome that shortfall." Instead, he says, mentoring is best suited to helping new teachers "translate their academic knowledge into meaningful instruction." Nor should school districts construe mentoring programs as substitutes for rigorous, university-based preservice teacher preparation programs. Without careful planning and sound design, mentoring programs by their very nature run the risk of reinforcing conservative, traditional practice at the exclusion of all that is new and innovative. Instead, a good mentoring program should combine the best new approaches to teaching with time-tested strategies known to work well for students.

Guidelines for Effective Programs—

There is, of course, no single program design that meets the needs of every district in every situation. Urban schools often encounter different challenges from rural schools. Likewise, districts with large numbers of new hires or those experiencing recruitment difficulties may wish to structure their mentor programs differently from districts where large-scale turnover is less of an issue. Regardless of the situation, however, "mentoring is no longer seen as an option," says Tom Ganser, noting broad consensus on the importance of mentoring. "It's seen as an essential part of staff development and a part of envisioning schools as professional learning communities."

The issues and questions outlined below serve as guidelines for discussion and planning rather than a "how-to" manual. Like a good mentor, they are intended to prompt reflection — in this instance by schools, districts, higher education institutions, and teacher associations — about how they currently serve teachers and how they can ensure that every new teacher and every teacher new to an assignment is an effective teacher.

[2] *Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality*. United States Department of Education, 1998.

Creating the Climate, Context, and Structure for Effective Mentoring

Recruiting New Teachers, an organization based in Belmont, Massachusetts, recently published a poll showing that 91 percent of the general public approves of mentoring programs as a way to help meet the staffing needs of schools.[3] When a range of different associations, policymakers, educators, and business leaders formed the Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools, the subject of teacher mentoring was the focus of their interests and attention. Cindy Heider of the Missouri National Education Association explains: "Everybody could agree that mentoring . . . is an important component of professional support. So we chose a topic that we thought was both crucial and one which we could agree to support."

Successful mentoring benefits all stakeholders. For school administrators, mentoring aids recruitment and retention; for higher education institutions, it helps to ensure a smooth transition from campus to classroom; for teacher associations, it represents a new way to serve members and guarantee instructional quality; for teachers, it can represent the difference between success and failure; and for parents and students, it means better teaching.

Mentoring is not an enterprise for those who prefer to work alone, either as individuals or as organizations. It requires partners. This is the *sine qua non* of an effective program. From the placement of first-time teachers, to finding time for mentoring, to strategies to fund programs, to issues of confidentiality, to the policies that assemble the nuts and bolts of programs, mentoring works well when everyone with a stake in its outcomes is fully involved in its planning and implementation.

"Second-Generation" Mentoring—

Over the past thirty years, mentoring programs have become progressively more structured, more formal, and more dependent on the cooperation and good offices of school administrators, teacher representatives, and higher education faculty. Tom Ganser speaks and writes of a shift from "first-generation" to "second-generation" mentoring programs. The latter are more likely to *require* participation by new teachers, extend for periods longer than one year, match protégés with a number of mentors who provide assistance in different areas of expertise, attend more closely to the systemic issues that influence the effectiveness of new teachers, and abide by clear, written agreements, often between a school district and its teacher association.

Three issues highlight characteristics of "second-generation" mentoring and the importance of partnerships to support effective programs: time, confidentiality, and beginning teacher placement.

Time for Mentoring—

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics dramatically demonstrate that the efficacy of mentoring is linked to the amount of time that a mentor and protégé work together. Only 36 percent of protégés who work with mentors "a few times a year" report substantial improvements to their instructional skills. That figure jumps to an impressive 88 percent for those who work with mentors at least once a week. Mark Jones of NEA-Alaska identifies time as an issue of primary importance for mentoring programs. He recommends that teacher associations and districts conclude written agreements to provide mentors and protégés with adequate opportunities to observe one another, model good teaching, and discuss instructional strategies and resources. "Without that commitment in advance when you establish a mentor program," he says, "you have to rely on . . . your ability to persuade on a case-by-case basis that . . . these observation opportunities [are] critical to the success of the mentoring program."

[3] *Future Teacher*. Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., Winter/Spring 1999.

In Anchorage, Alaska, mentors work with their protégés on site during the school day for a minimum of twenty-five hours per year. Mentors maintain a detailed log of everything that is observed and discussed during this time. The school district and the teacher association have also collaborated to organize and train more than two dozen retired teachers to assist with the program. Their time is often less formally structured than that of practicing classroom teachers. Retired teachers can serve as mentors themselves and/or release full-time teachers, allowing them to engage in mentoring activities. Higher education faculty can play similar roles in a well-structured program.

Other design features that affect this all-important matter of time include the proximity of mentors to their protégés, the use of e-mail and other technologies to maintain a mentoring dialogue in between face-to-face mentoring sessions, the ratio of mentors to new teachers, and the question of whether or not veteran teachers should act as mentors on a full-time basis, if only for a prescribed term of service. All of these issues require serious discussion by the partners who create and implement a mentoring program.

The issue of full-time versus part-time mentors can be particularly vexing. Many teachers who serve as mentors emphasize the extent and complexity of the role and the difficulty of balancing a classroom schedule with consistent attentiveness to the myriad needs of their protégés. This is especially true if a mentor's responsibilities include peer review, which involves evaluating a protégé and making recommendations pertaining to continued employment. Others prefer to maintain their classroom activities to some degree. In reference to the mentoring program in Arizona's Glendale Union High School District, Donnis Deever explains: "We were coaches for three-fifths of our contract, and we were in the classroom for two-fifths of our contract, which we all felt very strongly was a highly important aspect of the program because we still had kids. . . . We knew what lunch hour felt like. We knew what three o'clock in the afternoon felt like. But we were free a large part of the day to be able to be in and out of classrooms of not only brand new teachers, but anyone who came to the district . . . as an experienced teacher."

Confidentiality—

The confidentiality of mentoring is another area that is often best governed by clear, carefully crafted policies. When Ms. Deever's principal invited her to serve as a mentor, she stated up front, "I'll consider taking the position, but I want you to know that I will not hold conversations with you about any of the protégés." The mentoring programs in Anchorage and Ketchikan, Alaska, include formal memoranda of agreement in which the districts and the local teacher associations consent to keep confidential all proceedings between mentors and their protégés. These agreements stipulate that neither party may call a mentor to testify in a dismissal or disciplinary process for a protégé. The intent of these agreements, says Mark Jones, is to encourage people "to share their inadequacies with a colleague whom they trust. They need to be confident that the dialogue they have with their mentor is safe and secure and that they will get nurturing and supportive feedback from that mentor."

Programs that include peer review in addition to peer assistance, such as those in Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, may require different confidentiality provisions than those put in place in Anchorage and Ketchikan. The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have jointly published a comprehensive handbook to help guide the development of a successful peer assistance and review program.[4] All of these programs, however, operate according to clear, mutually agreed upon policies designed to maintain the integrity of the mentoring relationship according to high standards of professionalism.

[4] *Peer Assistance and Review: An AFT/NEA Handbook*. American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, 1998.

Teacher Placement—

Often unwritten, on the other hand, is the tradition that governs the placement of new teachers in their initial assignments. Evelyn Dandy, who directs the Pathways Program at Armstrong Atlantic State University, echoes a familiar lament: "We take brand new teachers and place them with the most difficult children. . . . We're in danger of losing committed people in their early years of teaching because they are being burned out." Mentoring programs operate within, and are broadly influenced by, the climate, habits, and pervasive attitudes that characterize a school. Even the best mentoring programs can be made better if teachers, teacher association leaders, and school administrators agree to change traditions that assign the most experienced teacher to advanced placement calculus, while the newest faculty member struggles to teach remedial algebra to students with learning difficulties.

Experts in teacher mentoring suggest that school faculties engage in discussions about how best to induct new colleagues to the site. Veteran faculty can assume a leadership role by teaching the most challenging classes, thereby allowing new teachers to ease into the trials associated with beginning a new career. In such instances, highly experienced faculty are invigorated by the challenge of a tough assignment, new faculty acquire confidence and stand a better chance at success, students are better served, and the school as a whole benefits from an environment of collaboration and *esprit de corps*. New teachers can also observe how accomplished teachers handle their challenging assignments.

The importance of this sense of collegiality cannot be overestimated. Formal mentoring programs leave an imprint on the dynamics of a school. Lona Lewis, executive director of the South Dakota Education Association and an NFIE board member notes, for example, that "one of the long-term benefits of mentoring is how it helps teachers to learn from and collaborate with one another on an adult-to-adult level." But there are dangers, too. "An experienced staff member," suggests Tom Ganser, "might think, 'Well if there weren't a mentoring program, I'd have to interact with that new teacher in some way. But he's got a mentor, she's got a mentor. So let the mentor take care of it.'" He adds, "When you begin to view mentoring as an integrated aspect of how schools operate, this type of thinking changes." In its "second-generation" manifestation, mentoring becomes inseparable from the daily business of a school and helps to create an ethos of lifelong learning. Every faculty member acquires an important role to play, however indirectly, by contributing to a school climate that fosters assistance for new and veteran teachers alike.

For their part, protégés must arrive from preservice teacher education programs fully prepared to seek and accept peer assistance, notes Kansas NEA Vice President Christy Levings. Higher education institutions have a role in fostering such habits of mind. Evelyn Dandy observes: "When you look at good teachers and the undergraduate programs that prepare them, you can find an inner belief and expectation that they will succeed."

"Don't be too sensitive," is Beth Felix's advice to new teachers when receiving critiques of their instructional practice from mentors. She herself has been a protégé in a mentor program serving teachers new to the Lower Kuskokwim School District in western Alaska. This program requires protégés to sign an agreement stipulating that they will participate fully in mentoring activities. "Protégés cannot be intimidated," Ms. Felix continues. "They need to be willing to ask questions."

Asking questions — asking the right questions — is the first step in reflecting on and establishing the context, climate, and structure of an effective mentoring effort. The list below may be used to initiate a dialogue

among school districts, teacher associations, higher education institutions, and other partners seeking to create or refurbish a teacher mentoring program.

Creating the Climate, Context, and Structure for Effective Mentoring
Key Questions to Consider:

- **Do we have existing state or local mentoring policies and are these effective?**
- **What policies and practices are barriers to mentoring and how can these be overcome?**
- **What partners should be involved in the creation of the mentoring program and how?**
  - District administrators and school board members?
  - Teacher association leaders?
  - Parents?
  - University faculty?
  - Retired teachers?
  - Others?
- **Do we need a formal, written governing agreement for our mentoring program?**
  - Who should be the parties to this agreement?
- **Who will be involved in providing ongoing direction for the mentoring program?**
  - District administrators and school board members?
  - Teacher association leaders?
  - Parents?
  - University faculty?
  - Retired teachers?
  - Others?
- **Which teachers will receive mentoring?**
  - First time teachers right out of college?
  - Teachers new to the state, new to the school district, or new to a school?
  - Teachers experiencing a change in grade level, type of assignment, or cultural environment?
  - Veteran teachers who are experiencing difficulties?
- **Will participation in the mentoring program be mandatory or voluntary?**
- **How long will a protégé participate in a mentoring program?**
- **How frequently should mentoring activities occur?**
- **What is the best way to provide time for mentoring?**
- **Will our teacher-mentors be full-time or will they have classroom duties, too?**
- **How long will mentors serve?**
- **What is our target mentor-protégé ratio?**
- **How will we ensure that the mentor-protégé relationship remains confidential?**
- **What operational changes need to be made in our schools to make mentoring possible?**
  - Do we need to change the nature of new teachers' initial assignments?
  - Do mentors and protégés have ready access to email and telephones?
- **How will our university partners prepare teachers to give and receive peer assistance?**
- **How will retired teachers become involved in the program?**
  - How will they be compensated for their participation?

Selecting, Training, and Supporting Mentors

Criteria for Selecting Mentors—

Professor Ganser explains the Tom Sawyer approach to mentor selection. It is not a model worthy of imitation: "I can remember a teacher telling me this story. He was outside in early August painting a white fence, like Tom Sawyer. His principal, driving past in a car, stopped and said, 'We're hiring a new teacher this year. Would you like to be his mentor?'"

In the second generation of mentoring programs, such informality yields to a more structured approach that identifies the characteristics of effective mentors, selects a pool of individuals who meet these standards, and establishes an optimal set of priorities for matching mentors with their protégés. In describing the ideal mentor, teachers, school administrators, and higher education faculty most often have in mind a highly skilled teacher (or someone with close connections to the classroom) who has earned the esteem of colleagues and who possesses the confidence and "presence" to offer counsel to other adults. Dr. Jody Shelton, assistant superintendent for the Olathe District Schools in Kansas, observes: "A mentor needs to offer criticism and critiques in positive and pro-

ductive ways." The mentoring relationship, she notes, "needs to be a skillful sharing of views." Catherine Moore, a former protégé and now mentor in Savannah, emphasizes that the best mentors exhibit a "passion for teaching." Such comments suggest that effective mentors exercise diplomacy in collegial relationships and model a devotion to the profession.

Good mentors also demonstrate a variety of skills and knowledge that come with experience: "knowing the ropes" of a school district, for example, and understanding the politics of the school community, as well as having access to a network of instructional resources. Other attributes are less a function of years on the job and more a matter of especially good "people skills." Says Beth Felix, "Having somebody who knows how to express care for your emotional, professional, and other needs can make all the difference."

The qualities of effective mentors — as identified by participants in mentoring programs nationwide — may be organized into four general categories: attitude and character; professional competence and experience; communication skills; and interpersonal skills. Together with a willingness to serve and a vote of confidence by colleagues, these characteristics comprise guidelines for selecting mentors.

Attitude and Character

- Willing to be a role model for other teachers
- Exhibits strong commitment to the teaching profession
- Believes mentoring improves instructional practice
- Willing to advocate on behalf of colleagues
- Willing to receive training to improve mentoring skills
- Demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning
- Is reflective and able to learn from mistakes
- Is eager to share information and ideas with colleagues
- Is resilient, flexible, persistent, and open-minded
- Exhibits good humor and resourcefulness
- Enjoys new challenges and solving problems

Professional Competence and Experience

- Is regarded by colleagues as an outstanding teacher
- Has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter
- Has confidence in his/her own instructional skills
- Demonstrates excellent classroom-management skills
- Feels comfortable being observed by other teachers
- Maintains a network of professional contacts
- Understands the policies and procedures of the school, district, and teacher association
- Is a meticulous observer of classroom practice
- Collaborates well with other teachers and administrators
- Is willing to learn new teaching strategies from protégés

Communication Skills

- Is able to articulate effective instructional strategies
- Listens attentively
- Asks questions that prompt reflection and understanding
- Offers critiques in positive and productive ways
- Uses email effectively
- Is efficient with the use of time
- Conveys enthusiasm and passion for teaching
- Is discreet and maintains confidentiality

Interpersonal Skills

- Is able to maintain a trusting professional relationship
- Knows how to express care for a protégé's emotional and professional needs
- Is attentive to sensitive political issues
- Works well with individuals from different cultures
- Is approachable; easily establishes rapport with others
- Is patient

The Bellevue School District in suburban Seattle uses an especially rigorous process for selecting its mentors, or "peer consulting educators," as they are known in the district. The governing panel for Bellevue's peer assistance and review program asks the district's teachers to nominate candidates. The panel — which consists of four school administrators, three teachers, and the president of the local teacher association — then invites nominees to apply. Mentor candidates, all of whom have three or more years of teaching experience in Bellevue, must submit three letters of recommendation (including one from a fellow teacher) and respond in writing to detailed questions about their skills and knowledge pertaining to mentoring. After being interviewed, prospective mentors critique a twenty-minute videotape of a teacher at work in the classroom. In this exercise, candidates describe and analyze the instructional strategies and student learning on display and offer suggestions for improving the quality of teaching in that classroom. Based on this information and conversations with references, the panel chooses its mentors for various grade levels.

Matching Mentors and Protégés—

The Bellevue model effectively combines thoroughness and a strong voice for teachers. For many districts, however, there remains the challenge posed by supply and demand. The increasing number of new teachers and the rise in the number of retirements complicate the mentor selection process, as well as the process by which mentors are matched to their protégés. "That pool of experienced teachers is becoming proportionately smaller," notes Tom Ganser. "The people you would want as mentors are the people who are doing everything else as well. They are on the curriculum committees; they are on the site-based management team; they are on the search and screen teams for hiring new teachers; they are very active professionally," he says.

One possible solution involves abandoning the traditional model of matching a protégé to a single mentor in favor of matching a protégé to several different mentors, each of whom offers assistance in various specialized areas, such as grade-level and/or subject-matter expertise, the use of technology, classroom management, and the everyday questions involving policies, politics, and procedures. Through what Professor Ganser calls a "mentoring mosaic," the burden of mentoring is shared equally by a larger number of veteran staff, including the principal. The protégé benefits from more specialized expertise and the opportunity to observe several different teaching styles, precisely what many mentoring experts believe a new teacher needs most. This strategy also reduces the need to establish what is very often impossible: the perfect match between a protégé and a first-rate mentor who teaches the same grade-level and/or subject, is located in the same wing of the building, and possesses a compatible personality.

Incentives—

The demands of mentoring and the desire to attract the services of the very best candidates highlight the importance of incentives. A reduced or modified course load for both mentors and protégés ranks at or near the top of anyone's list of needs for a successful mentoring program. Like other professionals, mentors and protégés prefer to work under conditions that lead to success. Mentoring achieves less when it is relegated to after hours and weekends.

Having an important role in the governance of a mentoring program may be equally attractive for would-be mentors seeking to exercise their leadership talents while remaining very much within the profession. Most teachers have few such opportunities during their careers. Also, school districts and state education agencies can collaborate to provide mentors with credit towards relicensure or recertification, where this is required by law.

The Virginia Department of Education, for example, includes service as a mentor among the professional development activities leading to relicensure, which is required every five years for teachers in the state.

The issue of stipends or additional pay as an incentive for mentors warrants caution. Stipends can engender skepticism among funding agencies as well as professional jealousy. "In South Dakota," explains Lona Lewis, "we lost the program after four years in part because we were asking for stipends for teachers during the regular school year." She suggests that districts seek time and flexible schedules for their mentors and protégés instead. "How you ask for funding, how you craft your request from a policy perspective, is key," she says. Similarly, Donnis Deever explains that stipends can be "one of those invisible elephants": Nobody is willing to speak openly about the envy caused by the additional pay, but it can lead to the "ruination" of a program. Ms. Deever and other planners of the Glendale, Arizona, program devoted funds that might have been used to pay stipends to training for mentors instead. This training took place during the summer months, and participants received a per diem payment for their summer work over and above their regular contract.

Mentor Training and Support—

The importance of training for mentors cannot be overstated. Phyllis Williams, a member of the professional development committee for United Teachers Los Angeles, notes: "In my first year of mentoring, I felt like a new teacher. The information was given to us quickly, and I felt lost. You are fumbling around trying to look like a mentor, but what you really need is someone to mentor the mentor." In Glendale, mentors receive three weeks of training and planning time during the summer. They also participate in monthly planning and informational meetings throughout the school year.

In Missouri, the state-level National Education Association affiliate, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and a host of education-related associations joined forces to establish a mentor training program through the agency of Missouri's regional professional development centers. "Our new model," says Missouri-NEA's Cindy Heider, "includes six days of training for prospective mentors. At the end of those six days, we hope that they . . . have a grasp of the role and responsibilities and resources available to them as mentors." The Missouri model includes assistance with

- facilitating reflective practice;
- understanding state mandates;
- establishing collaborative relationships premised on trust, collegiality, and confidentiality;
- developing classroom observation skills;
- creating long-term professional development plans for new teachers; and
- understanding the academic, professional, and social needs of new teachers.

Ms. Heider, however, is appropriately "working very hard to get away from anything that says, 'six days make you a mentor.' . . . I'm real hesitant to get locked into seat time, clock time, you name it, as any measurement of proficiency."

Teachers and school administrators involved in successful mentoring programs emphasize that training for mentors must be ongoing. Some programs provide mentors with ready access to the counsel of higher education faculty. Others provide mentors with common office space, which allows them to meet with each other on a regular basis, discuss coaching strategies, share instructional resources, and plan additional ways to assist their protégés.

Successful programs also protect their mentors from the burden of administrative duties. "Mentors," insists Donnis Deever, "should be trained in how to communicate to the staff that they are carrying out appointments,

observations, and very specific responsibilities. It should be clear from the district administration to the site administration that [mentors] are not asked to be test director or any of those other things that are semi-administrative jobs, because pretty soon that's the way [they'll] be perceived, as an administrator, not as a confidential mentor."

Some teachers after serving successfully as mentors do indeed wish to pursue careers as school administrators. Public education benefits from the skills they bring to their new positions. Nonetheless, schools, school districts, and teacher associations must accommodate and facilitate a mentor's return to full-time classroom duties. "This is particularly important," notes Tom Ganser, "if you have full-time mentors who control their own time." Mark Jones of NEA-Alaska adds, "It would be a shame to lose them from the instructional component of the school." Mr. Jones advocates changes that make the classroom more attractive to teachers with specialized expertise and leadership abilities. Schools, he says, must recognize "that a person may have a leadership role on the faculty without being part of the administrative staff."

There are no easy solutions to this challenge. It necessitates cooperation between a school district and its teacher association and may involve significant changes to the teachers' contract, including differentiated roles and responsibilities for teachers. Like other aspects of a quality mentoring program, the way a district supports its mentors requires systemic changes that affect school climate, conventional definitions of the job of teaching, and a host of policies and procedures governing school business. It is important to keep these contextual factors in mind when answering the following guiding questions.

Selecting, Training, and Supporting Mentors Key Questions to Consider:

- **What criteria will be used to select mentors?**
  - Who will help to define these criteria?
- **Who will be involved in choosing mentors?**
  - Other teachers?
  - Principals?
  - Teacher association representatives?
  - District administrators?
  - Current mentors?
  - Protégés?
  - Others?
- **What incentives will attract the best candidates to serve as mentors?**
  - Modified/reduced teaching schedules?
  - Leadership opportunities?
  - Relicensure/recertification credit?
  - Other incentives?
- **How will mentors be matched to protégés?**
  - One-to-one matching?
  - A "mentoring mosaic"?
  - Who will coordinate the matching?
- **How will mentors be trained?**
  - When will the training take place?
  - Who will plan and provide the training?
  - Will mentors be *required* to participate in the training?
  - What will be the focus of the training?
  - How will higher education institutions assist with mentor training?
- **What resources and expertise will be made available to mentors?**
  - Ongoing counsel from higher education faculty and other mentors?
  - Office space?
  - Ready access to laptop computers and other equipment?
  - Other resources?
- **How will the school, school district, and teacher association facilitate a mentor's return to the classroom full-time?**

Content and Evaluation

What Protégés Need from Mentors—

More so than in years past, schools now hire many different kinds of "new" teachers or "beginning teachers," notes Tom Ganser. Some new teachers may have years of experience in another state or district or grade level or subject area. Some are new to teaching but hardly new to the world of work, having enjoyed success in other careers, such as business, law, or the military. Similarly, there are different entry points into the profession. Many follow the traditional route offered by preservice preparation programs at colleges and universities. The extent of the field experiences offered by these programs, however, may differ dramatically. A significant number of protégés begin full-time teaching only after obtaining a master's degree. Others enter the classroom with "emergency" or "provisional" licenses or after completing nontraditional preservice programs.

Not surprisingly, therefore, what a protégé needs most from a mentor varies significantly over time and differs from new teacher to new teacher. Professor Ganser explains that "second-generation" mentoring programs "have moved away from thinking about the needs of new teachers as very general and predictable to viewing their needs as individual and less predictable." Fifteen years ago, for example, beginning teachers most often expressed a need for help with issues pertaining to classroom discipline and student motivation. Recently, Professor Ganser has found that many beginning teachers are more concerned with the challenge of time management. He emphasizes that mentoring programs must not assume that the needs of beginning teachers are static.

Successful mentors speak of helping protégés expand their repertoire — skills, strategies, and knowledge useful in different teaching situations and settings. These can be acquired by observing many different teaching styles, comparing notes with other beginning teachers, consulting at length with one or (preferably) more mentors, and other means.

Mentors emphasize that many beginning teachers progress in stages. Roselva Ungar, a mentor teacher in Los Angeles, says that during her first year of mentoring, she overwhelmed her protégés with too much information. What they really wanted to learn early on, she says, was basic logistical information. She and other mentors outlined three stages of working with a protégé. The **first stage** focuses on practical skills and information — where to order supplies, how to organize a classroom, where to find instructional resources, what kind of assistance the teacher association can provide, etc. During the **second stage**, mentors and protégés can concentrate more intently on the art and science of teaching and on polishing classroom management skills. In **stage three**, the focus shifts to a deeper understanding of instructional strategies and ongoing professional development that is based on the assessed needs of students. Where a new teacher enters this matrix and how long each stage lasts vary according to the knowledge, experience, and skills that a protégé brings to the job. A skillful mentor works with a protégé to determine what level of assistance to provide and when to provide it.

Jean Savidge, a retired teacher from Westport, Washington, adds another dimension to this framework: a certain degree of self-reliance to build confidence over time. "A full-time mentor," she says, may be "in danger of spending too much time with the protégé if they're right there in the classroom. Protégés also need time to be on their own."

As with other aspects of a good mentoring program, the content of the mentoring experience is shaped by the broader context of school and district. Ideally, mentoring is but one component of a more comprehensive

assistance strategy for new teachers. A district-level instructional department, a school-based instructional team, or both might be available to provide protégés with training and assistance pertaining to academic content, curriculum development, and student assessments. An effective mentor collaborates in this process (and can serve as an advocate for protégés) but should not be held solely responsible for ensuring that protégés have a full understanding of a school's instructional program. This obligation must be shared more broadly by the entire faculty and administration. A mentor connects protégés to the resources available within the school, within the district, or in nearby partnering institutions.

The content of mentoring is also shaped by the specific needs of the student population, their families, and the community at large. This can be especially important if new teachers are unfamiliar with the culture and traditions of the community. Mentors in the Lower Kuskokwim School District in western Alaska, for example, help protégés, many of whom come from the Lower Forty-eight, to shape their instruction so that it is meaningful for the district's Yup'ik Eskimo students and resonates with the life experiences of residents in a largely subsistence culture. Mentors, for example, help new teachers understand that certain rites of passage — such as finding a first bird's egg in the spring — are deeply significant moments in children's lives, or that a Yup'ik girl may raise her eyebrows to respond "yes" to a teacher's question. Protégés also look to their mentors for guidance when interacting with Yup'ik parents. This level of assistance can make the difference between success and failure for a new teacher. Certainly it affects the quality of learning in the classroom. Such cultural differences are present in many forms in schools and communities across the country. Good mentoring programs address these issues in a substantive, rigorous way.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Mentoring—

The quality of classroom learning is the bottom line for evaluating a mentoring program. Research still tells us too little about the direct connection between teacher mentoring and student achievement. A district's college or university partners might be particularly helpful in the complex task of documenting this link. In effective programs, however, evaluation figures prominently on many different levels. In programs that include peer review, mentors play a role in evaluating their protégés, ideally in a way that maintains an open, trusting dialogue. Good programs also hold mentors themselves accountable. In Donnis Deever's Arizona school district, mentors "were probably held the most accountable of any group in the district," she says. "Our protégés did a very formal evaluation of us at the end of the year. Our administrators did an evaluation of us. The project director that we worked with at the district did an analysis of us as part of a portfolio. So we were probably the most analyzed group in the district."

At the program level, evaluation and careful documentation help both to improve the effectiveness of mentoring and to justify the investment to policymakers and education's stakeholders. "Always keep statistics," advises Evelyn Dandy, who understands well that school boards and funding agencies require convincing evidence that mentoring pays dividends. Short of unambiguous proof that mentoring increases student test scores, participating districts, teacher associations, higher education institutions, and other partners can study a variety of data indicating a program's success or shortfalls. Wendy Patterson, the head teacher coach for the Mt. Diablo Education Association in California, suggests that school districts should study improvements in classroom management, student time on task, parent satisfaction, and the degree to which protégés use time and resources efficiently. In Missouri, Cindy Heider is investigating, "Do we, in fact, show improved satisfaction with teachers' first-year experience? Do they, in fact, stay? Do we have principals who have identified that they've had fewer

issues related to any sort of job action or a disciplinary action or interventions to support that beginning teacher's experience because the mentor program is in place?" Ms. Heider intends to use these data to improve how mentors across the state interact with their protégés. She also wishes to construct a convincing argument demonstrating that mentor programs offer a significant return on investment — that the cost of mentoring and retaining new teachers is less than the combined outlay for large-scale recruitment and long-term remediation.

Elijah West Jr., a one-time protégé and now a mentor at Garrison Elementary School in Savannah, reminds us that from time to time "somebody has to be willing to take the price tags off." With mentoring, he says, "rewards come back at different times and in different ways." These are words to be remembered — by policymakers, who must adopt a long-range view of the benefits of mentoring; by mentors, who often put in long, uncompensated hours only to wonder if their efforts are paying off; and by protégés, who take to heart good counsel and, perhaps, one day return the favor by becoming mentors themselves, as Mr. West has done for his colleagues in Savannah.

Content and Evaluation Key Questions to Consider:

- **How shall we determine what new teachers need most from the mentoring experience?**
  - Who will be involved in making this determination?
- **How will the district and its partners individualize the mentoring experience to meet the specific needs of each protégé?**
- **How will the focus of mentoring change during the course of a protégé's involvement in the program?**
  - Will the mentoring program be divided into stages according to the evolving needs of the protégé?
- **Will the mentoring program provide remedial assistance to veteran teachers experiencing difficulties?**
- **Will the mentoring program include peer review?**
- **How will mentors interact with others in the district and with representatives of partnering organizations to ensure that protégés have access to comprehensive professional development opportunities, including assistance with curriculum content and student assessments?**
- **How will mentors be assessed for their performance?**
  - Who will be involved in making this assessment?
- **What evidence will be used to evaluate and document the effectiveness of the program?**
  - Student achievement data?
  - Indicators of teacher satisfaction?
  - Teacher retention data?
  - Decreased need for teacher remediation?
  - Cost-benefit data?
  - Anecdotal evidence?
  - Other indicators?
- **Who should be involved in evaluating and documenting the mentoring program?**
  - An independent program evaluator?
  - Mentors?
  - Protégés?
  - School administrators?
  - Teacher association leaders?
  - Others?

Conclusion: Advancing the Teaching Profession

Changes in our society require educators, like the scientific community, to meet increasingly complex challenges. Mentoring is one important mechanism for advancing the teaching profession as a whole. As physicist Kenneth Wilson notes, it can help raise standards for all teachers in a building or a district, not just newcomers or those changing assignments. It can also help to create cohesive schools where teachers and administrators constantly discuss instructional practice and student learning. Increasingly, teachers are viewing their collective expertise as expanding and improving with time, as large numbers of teachers develop innovations that lead to student success and then pass this vast knowledge on to colleagues. To achieve an expanding repertoire of skills for the entire profession, with steadily improving results for children, all teachers at all stages of development must maintain their growth as professionals by learning from and with each other.

The payoff of mentoring, says Professor Wilson, accumulates with time. Each year may show only modest gains, especially during the start-up phase of a mentoring program. The benefits of mentoring, however, become more obvious as the years pass. A generation from now, reaching the summit of Everest will be routine. So it should be with today's most difficult educational challenges.

Resources

Reports and Articles:

"Impact of a Collaborative Peer Assistance and Review Model on Entry-Year Teachers in a Large Urban School Setting." Sandra A. Stroot, et al. *Journal of Teacher Education*, January–February 1999.

Mentor Teacher Programs. Sandra J. Odell. National Education Association, 1990.

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Mentoring Program Standards. Raymond J. Dagenais. Mentoring Leadership Resource Network of ASCD, 1996. http://www.mentors.net/OcassPapers/MStandards.html

Mentoring the Bilingual Teacher. Maria E. Torres-Guzman. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1996. http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/resource/mentor.htm

Peer Assistance and Review: An AFT/NEA Handbook. American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, 1998.

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Teacher Mentoring: A Critical Review. Sharon Feiman-Nemser. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1998.

Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success. Judith Rényi. National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1996. http://www.nfie.org/takechar.htm

Telementoring: An Examination of the Potential for an Educational Network. David J. Wighton. USWest Academic Development and Technology Center at Creighton University, 1993. http://mentor.creighton.edu/htm/telement.htm

What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996. http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm

Websites/Organizations:

International Mentoring Association: http://php.indiana.edu/~brescia/ment

Mentoring Leadership and Resource Network: http://www.mentors.net/index.html

National Education Association: http://www.nea.org

National Foundation for the Improvement of Education: http://www.nfie.org

Recruiting New Teachers: http://www.rnt.org

Acknowledgments

NFIE extends special thanks to Dr. Evelyn Baker Dandy of Armstrong Atlantic State University, Donnis Deever of the National School Conference Institute, Dr. Tom Ganser of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (gansert@mail.uww.edu), Cindy Heider of the Missouri National Education Association, Mark Jones of NEA-Alaska, Gary Obermeyer of Learning Options, Dr. Beverly Parsons of InSites, Dr. Kenneth G. Wilson of The Ohio State University, the members and leaders of United Teachers Los Angeles, and participants in NFIE's 1999 Teacher Mentoring Symposium.

NFIE's work on teacher mentoring and professional development is made possible in part by grants from The Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York and by ongoing support from its founder, the National Education Association.

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