

TEACHER ORIENTATION & PREPARATION PROGRAM MENTOR GUIDE 2009-10

Can you name a person who had a positive and enduring impact on your personal or professional life, someone worthy of being called your mentor? Had he or she been trained to serve in such a role or been formally assigned to help you? Most teachers with 10 or more years of experience were typically not assigned a mentor, but instead found informal support from a caring colleague. Unfortunately, not all teachers found this support. In fact, many veterans remember their first year in the classroom as a difficult and lonely time during which no one came to their aid.

Much has changed in the past decade, however, because many school districts have established induction-year programs that pair beginning teachers with veteran, mentor teachers. In the majority of such cases, the matching occurs before they meet and establish a personal relationship. This prevalent aspect of school-based mentoring programs presents special challenges that are further exacerbated when mentor teachers receive inadequate or no training and only token support for their work.

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to the teachers who have agreed to mentor TOPP teachers. It is critical that new teachers have the opportunity to work and learn from an experienced educator.

The purpose of this guide is to provide helpful information to the mentor and mentee as they embark on what we hope is a significant and meaningful professional collegial relationship.

“Life’s greatest gift is the opportunity to throw oneself into a job that puts meaning and hope into the lives of other people. Seizing this opportunity is the surest way to put meaning and hope into one’s own life.”

Martin Haberman, 1995

Teacher Orientation & Preparation Program Mentor Qualifications

- **Certified Teacher (holds valid Texas credentials)**
- **Has a minimum of 2 years experience**
- **Is considered a proficient teacher by campus administration**
- **Allocates time to plan, reflect, observe, etc.**
- **Shares similar assignments/grade level/subjects (if possible)**
- **Is willing to be a teacher mentor**
- **Is approved by campus administrator and/or district selection process**

Sharing Expertise ...

Every mentor has a specific body of professional knowledge and skill to share. In the teaching profession a part of this pedagogical knowledge is referred to as “content.” The content or subject matter to be taught to students must be transformed from the teachers’ university level knowledge of the subject into a form that is appropriate for the readiness level of each particular group of students. In other words, the subject matter must be repackaged to fit the students’ maturational, developmental, or grade level, and the range of previous experiences the students are likely to have had. Experienced teachers develop a sense of how well various groups of students will understand specific subject matter when the content is presented at different levels of complexity. They are able to “repackage” the content to fit different needs. Similarly, teachers use a variety of teaching methods, each adopted to achieve a specific outcome.

Purposes of Mentoring

- Welcome and support new professionals
- Provide moral and emotional support
- Provide resources, focus, and direction
- Suggest effective practices
- Encourage implementation of effective teaching strategies
- Validate new teachers

Mentoring ...

- Involves two people in intense mutual examination of teaching and learning.
- Provides effective role modeling and leadership.
- Builds confidence, encourages creativity, and fosters flexibility.
- Enables mentors to confirm their own strengths and to develop new ones.

“Should I be a Mentor?” Checklist

The checklist below is designed to guide the self-reflection of individuals who are becoming mentors. The checklist provides a description of the qualities that are most often thought to be conducive to successful mentoring. Successful mentors generally have many of the qualities listed here, along with some other valuable qualities that are not listed here but are unique to them as individuals.

To use the checklist, respondents should read each statement and place an X in the appropriate column that represents the degree to which the statement characterizes the way the respondent sees himself or herself. After ranking each statement (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Neutral; (4) Disagree; or (5) Strongly Disagree, respondents may reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses.

There is no single “ideal profile,” but respondents who possess many of these qualities are likely to serve well as mentors. It is also important to recognize that many of the qualities listed here are developed or learned and is the result of practice.

	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
1 I see myself as being people oriented; I like and enjoy working with other professionals.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2 I am a good listener and respect my colleagues.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3 I am sensitive to the needs and feelings of others.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4 I realize when others need support or independence.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5 I want to contribute to the professional development of others and to share what I have learned.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6 I am willing to find reward in service to someone who needs my assistance.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7 I am able to support and help without smothering, parenting, or taking charge.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8 I see myself generally as flexible and willing to adjust my personal schedule to meet the needs of someone else.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9 I am patient and tolerant when teaching someone.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10 I am confident and secure in my knowledge of the field and make an effort to remain up-to-date.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11 I enjoy the subject(s) I teach.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12 I set high standards for myself and my students.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13 I use a variety of teaching methods, and my students achieve well.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Mentor Tips

Prepare for the new teacher's arrival. Preparations made before the beginning teacher arrives in the school help both the mentor and the new teacher adjust to the new experience. Collect materials that may help the new teacher. Remember that the first year teacher will need to be oriented to facets of school life which have become second nature to experienced teachers – the school building, the school schedule, school policies, classroom procedures, faculty routines, etc. A map of the school building, copies of handbooks, and copies of class bell schedules would be helpful. Having a folder of items available when the new teacher arrives will demonstrate your interest and make the new teacher feel that this will be a good place to work.

Tips for Mentor Teachers Working With New Teachers

- establish a strong and trusting professional relationship with new teachers
- develop mutual respect for each other's competence
- commit to a long-term, developmental view of teacher growth
- facilitate rather than control the professional development of new teachers
- assist rather than assess the progress of the new teacher
- notice and build on the strengths of the new teacher
- focus on the new teacher's own goals for teaching
- agree together on the goals of your work
- use classroom data as a basis for analysis and discussion with the new teacher
- be a new-teacher advocate as you communicate and interact with the principal

More Tips for Mentor Teachers From Sandra Odell, Western Michigan University

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MENTOR'S CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT CHECKLIST

1. INSTRUCTIONAL: Giving information about teaching strategies, the instructional process, or content.

- a. Talk about curriculum guides, TEKS, and teachers' manuals. Discuss general instructional goals and TAKS connections.
- b. Share expertise on planning:
 - 1) Find out how you can be the most helpful in the area of planning.
 - 2) Team up before school begins and schedule regular times for planning.
 - 3) Discuss goals for the year or semester and objectives for units or lessons.
 - 4) Share catalogs for ordering instructional materials and equipment.
 - 5) Show how you organize your planning for the year, semester, week, and day.
 - 6) Talk about how and where to anticipate students' errors and misconceptions.
 - 7) Collaborate on a special unit of instruction or a project.
 - 8) Work together to design a new lab or learning centers.
 - 9) Share syllabi, units of study, or lessons that have worked well for you.
 - 10) Offer to share your computer software or show where other software can be found.
- c. Explain the expectations of subject/grade level teams regarding tests, discipline, duty schedule, interdisciplinary units, reading inventories, scope and sequence, etc.
- d. Help mentee acquire strategies to address TEKS content and TAKS objectives.
- e. Suggest lessons/activities/enrichments that can be used in the classroom to reinforce learning.
- f. Provide suggestions, methods, and rationale for addressing learners' needs:
 - 1) Evaluating student success
 - 2) Modifying activities to address specific individual needs
 - 3) Using manipulatives
 - 4) Motivating students
 - 5) Increasing student attention/engagement
- g. Provide scope and sequence of topics that must be covered during the school year.
- h. Discuss times for observing each other teaching.
- i. Offer to demonstrate lessons or labs – live or on videotape.
- j. Offer to videotape lessons or classes and offer to provide feedback.

2. SYSTEM: Giving information related to procedures and guidelines of the school and/or school district.

- a. Review the school handbook.
- b. Explain teachers' hours.
- c. Explain the process for accessing funds for supplies/materials.
- d. Review library procedures for checking out equipment.
- e. Explain process for scheduling class times in the library/computer lab, etc.
- f. Review schedule for grade level/faculty meetings and describe campus/district committees.
- g. Describe special school activities such as Sustained Silent Reading, Book Clubs, TAKS "sponges" or reviews.

3. RESOURCES: Collecting, disseminating, or locating resources for use by the new teacher.

- a. Acquaint mentee with the school building: its rooms, equipment, and grounds.
- b. Provide information regarding special services available through resource teachers, nurse, and counselor.
- c. Explain process for acquiring textbooks and complete textbook cards/forms.
- d. Provide information regarding what is available for use in the classroom. Help to locate media catalog.
- e. Use of the telephone and district and/or campus e-mail
- f. "Chain of command" to follow in case of complaint.
- g. Student records.

4. EMOTIONAL: Offering beginning teachers personal support through empathic listening and by sharing experiences.

- a. Explain how to balance being a good teacher and also have a life outside the classroom.
- b. Explain your role as a mentor and that you are always available to listen to concerns as well as to provide positive input.
- c. Recognize them as peers who have ideas/activities to share.
- d. Remind them that making mistakes is natural and a part of teaching/learning.
- e. Provide practical paperwork shortcuts.
- f. Designate weekly meetings to vent/share/update/provide positive feedback, etc.

5. MANAGERIAL: Managing and organizing the school day.

- a. When to arrive at school.
- b. Bell and duty schedules.
- c. Class seating arrangement/room arrangement.
- d. Organizing for first day.
- e. Organizing an entire week.
- f. Offer assistance for organizing materials before day/class begins.
- g. Explain system for taking attendance/grading/establish routines.

6. PARENTAL: Giving help and ideas related to conferencing or working with parents.

- a. Provide examples of introductory letters to parents that might include: grading system, supplies needed, special dates/events (open hours), etc.
- b. Explain when to contact parents: when child is doing poorly in class, homework is late, discipline problem, a positive phone call to say how well child is doing.
- c. Identify methods of documenting parent/guardian contact.
- d. Explain written progress report forms and procedures.

7. DISCIPLINARY: Giving guidance and ideas related to managing children.

- a. Share a few concise and positive rules for expected behavior in the classroom.
- b. Provide ideas to positively reinforce good behavior.
- c. Identify when to write a referral/send student to office/student/conference/parent conferences.

CHECKLIST FOR YOUR MENTEE

WHAT MENTORS NEED TO DISCUSS WITH MENTEES BEFORE OR SOON AFTER THE SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS

- Review the school handbook
- Explain your role as a mentor; ask what expectations the mentee has
- Teachers' hours
- Allotted funds for supplies and requisition procedures
- Supply room (open or restricted)
- Curriculum guides and teachers' manuals
- Library procedures for checking out equipment
- How to get help from the custodian
- How to check out textbooks and complete textbooks cards/forms
- How to get and stay in control; the importance of preparation/organization/setting the tone early on
- Community culture (what makes up our community; i.e., people, businesses, socio-economic backgrounds)
- Share grade level or team expectations (thematic units, pretests, reading inventories, scope and sequence, etc.)
- Resources available through Region 20 and location of media catalogs
- Parent communication: available forms, when and how often to contact
- Document, document, document

HELP YOUR MENTEE LOCATE

- Office
- Teachers' lounge
- Supply rooms
- Cafeteria
- Faculty restrooms
- Custodian's room
- Library
- Nurse's office
- Portables and all areas of school
- Content Mastery room
- Computer lab

ASSIST MENTEE IN KNOWING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL

- Bell schedule (if applicable)
- Procedures and requirements for safety drills
- Methods for checking attendance/taking lunch count
- Hall or other duties
- Printed forms used: hall passes, nurse passes, discipline referral slip

ADVISE MENTEE OF OTHER PROCEDURES

- Procedures for getting a substitute
- Library services
- Counseling services (for students)
- How to access adequate number of desks
- How to requisition textbooks
- Lesson plan format and policy
- Teacher mailboxes
- Keys to building and classrooms
- Grading policy
- Permanent files location
- How to work copiers, laminating, etc.
- Unwritten rules! (For example: Do not make appointments after school on meeting days.
Do not send a student to office without a pass from the teacher, etc.)

PLANNING FOR THE FIRST DAY

- Seating arrangements
- Rules and procedures
- Lesson plans for the first week (share examples)
- Plan for extra work (puzzles, seatwork pages, word search)
- Setting the tone
- CONFIDENCE

INTRODUCTION TO STAFF

Be sure mentee knows and is introduced to staff members:

Principals, teachers, secretaries, custodians, counselors, librarian, resource teachers, coaches, cafeteria staff.

A great deal of research literature documents the extent to which beginning teachers struggle in their early classroom years. Simon Veenman's (1984) classic international review of perceived problems among beginning teachers found remarkable consistency, across both time and differently structured education systems. Among the greatest challenges perceived by rookie teachers were classroom management, motivating students, dealing with the individual differences among students, assessing student work, and relations with parents.

Veenman's Most Frequently Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers

Rank Order	Problems	Frequency (N=91 studies)
1	classroom management	77
2	motivation of students	48
3	dealing with individuals	43
4	assessing students' work	31
5	relations with parents	31
6	organization of class work	27
7	insufficient materials/supplies	27
8	dealing with problems of individual students	26

From: Veenman, S. Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers.
Review of Educational Research, 1984, 54(2).

Common Initial Anxieties Experienced by Beginning Teachers

1. Does my mentor really want that role?
2. What will my mentor expect of me?
3. What standards does my mentor maintain? Will I measure up to those standards?
4. What are my mentor's special interests, personality characteristics, likes and dislikes?
5. What should I do when I make a mistake?
6. What should I do in the classroom if my material has been covered and there is extra time?
7. Will I be required to turn in my lesson plans and who will evaluate them?
8. When is the best time to ask my mentor questions?
9. How often will my mentor and I be able to plan or problem-solve together?