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A Mentoring Program to Strengthen Teacher Efficacy: A School Improvement Plan

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

Research findings show that mentoring programs have lacked consistency and accountability in schools, leaving new teachers behind and unprepared for their first years of teaching. Past studies have also documented beginning teachers' practices, wellbeing, and retention; mentoring programs; school leadership and support; and pre-service and induction programs. With research findings in mind, a school improvement plan was created to revise an existing mentoring program toward greater teacher efficacy. This plan improved a current mentoring program to create a successful induction process for new teachers, along with more consistency and accountability for mentors.

Keywords: beginning teachers, mentoring program, mentoring, mentoring relationships, school leadership, induction programs

Table of Contents

A Mentoring Program to Strengthen Teacher Efficacy: A School Improvement Plan

Due to a lack of accountability and inconsistency in the induction process at schools, first-year teachers are being left behind once the new school year begins. Schools have lacked consistency in their mentoring approach with having a mix of no provisions for beginning teachers to conducting mentoring programs in a haphazard manner due to clarity and structure (Hairon et al., 2020, p. 106). Hairon's study indicates that mentors, instructional coaches, and administration can all take part in the mentoring process, which can increase the quality of teaching from beginning teachers.

The failure to properly induct and guide new teachers impacts the entire district, including school leaders, mentors, beginning teachers, and students. First-year teachers and new teachers to any school district are the persons most directly impacted by the problem. The learnings from this school improvement plan impacted beginning teachers at a Northwest Iowa school district. With this impact, the quality of teaching will be increased, which impacted students' learning in the district. Although school leaders are not actively involved in mentoring, they play a vital role in teacher efficacy: "Other research indicates that principals can help with the induction of new teachers by promoting teacher collaboration and improving new teachers' mentoring experience" (Redding et al., 2019, p. 711). Administrators, instructional coaches, and mentors can all be held responsible and play a part in mentoring new teachers in the district (Redding et al., 2019).

Peer-reviewed research for this school improvement plan was found online through Northwestern College's DeWitt Library, primarily through the ERIC & Education Database. The research reviewed was action-based and not limited to any specific geographic location. The research intended to find literature that addresses the problem of inconsistent and unstructured

mentoring processes, while addressing the potential outcome of a good mentoring process. Articles were researched from the last ten years and included keywords such as beginning teachers, mentoring program, mentoring, mentoring relationships, school leadership, and induction programs. A literature review was completed to examine the need for consistent and structured mentoring processes. This literature review will describe the impact mentoring has on beginner teachers, various mentoring programs, leadership roles concerning beginning teachers, and tested induction processes.

A structured mentoring process leads to success in the classroom. Beginning teachers have increased self-efficacy, satisfaction, and commitment to the district and profession if led correctly (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). With a clear focus from leadership, the quality of teaching can be increased in any district. Current mentoring programs are not preparing beginner teachers to be successful in their first year because of the lack of mentor relationships, support, and professional development. The result from the research collected by Gümüş & Bellibaş (2020) suggests that teacher efficacy is increased when a mentoring program is intentional and structured.

Teachers are not getting the support they need to start and complete their first few years of teaching (Kearney, 2017). The current induction processes have been inconsistent and have failed beginning teachers when they have needed support most. The problem that this plan will address is the lack of consistency and accountability in new teachers' induction processes and mentoring experiences. In addition, this paper will address accountability checks for teachers in their first year in a new district to ensure success. "Teachers are being left on their own to initiate and execute reflective interventions for purpose of their professional improvement" (Reitman & Karge, 2019, p. 1). The purpose of this school improvement plan is to ensure that first-year

teachers are prepared to start the school year, put supports in place for consistency among mentors, plan specific accountability checks throughout their first year, and initiate ongoing progress checks for accountability in teacher-efficacy. Specifically, this plan focuses on a beginning teachers' mentoring process, which will improve the quality of beginning teachers' practices.

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Review of the Literature

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Beginning Teachers' Practices, Wellbeing, & Retention

Teachers' practices are based on students' behavior. In the study by Curry et al. (2016), 58 novice teachers were analyzed based on their first-semester experiences. Teachers discussed their views on the school systems in which they worked and depicted their experiences through art. According to the findings, novice teachers' drawings presented five themes: concerns about students being overwhelmed and struggling, relationships with staff members, concerns about education quality, concerns about excessive accountability, and issues with administration. The largest number of concerns expressed involved students:

> Because most teacher preparation programs focus on content and pedagogy, it is not uncommon for novice teachers to struggle with classroom management and students' behavior. Moreover, many novices are shocked by cultural disparities between their own culture and that of the culture students identify with. The differences in social values, norms, and perspectives on education may be overwhelming for novices (Curry et al., 2016, p. 59).

There is a need for teachers to first learn about their students and their culture before scripting their lesson plans. Discussions about the student makeup in a novice teachers' classroom would

benefit the creation of units, lesson plans, and relationships, which teachers overwise must accomplish on their own (Curry et al., 2016).

Low wellbeing among beginning teachers can be influenced by teachers' work environment. De Clercq et al. (2021) investigated teachers' profiles of professional wellbeing and impacts of work environment dimensions. These results were associated with professional engagement and retention by midcareer teachers. Online surveys were distributed to 734 primary and secondary Australian teachers, then again to different 414 primary and secondary Australian teachers a year later. The results of the research communicated that support from teachers' work environment in their early career helps teachers adjust to diverse classroom profiles from year to year. The demands from a new generation of kids and the COVID-19 pandemic have increased burnouts for all ages of educators. Teachers struggled with wornout and had decreased professional striving from over exhaustion, showing low wellbeing among beginning teachers (De Clercq et al., 2021, p. 647). This discovery suggests that teachers need a positive culture to boost teacher ability and motivation to become better professionals for their students. Healthier wellbeing of novice teachers leads to better wellbeing for teachers at midcareer (De Clercq et al., 2021).

Professional support can keep teachers in the profession. Sixty teachers were surveyed by Reitman & Karge (2019) and interviewed in Orange County regarding teacher supports in connection to teacher retention. Support for teachers can be given through professional development, conversations with co-workers and administration, and collaboration. The findings suggest that significant support may help teachers remain in teaching. Questions in this study focused on early service experience in relation to remaining in the teaching profession, along

with professional experiences that are most beneficial to their teaching practices. Reitman &

Karge's (2019) study found:

> From the participant interviews and open-ended questions, there is evidence to suggest
>
> many attribute their success to the additional support they received from the program. Six
>
> themes emerged to demonstrate support strategies: (a) individual relationships, (b)
>
> pedagogical knowledge, (c) teacher perception of their perceived competence, (d)
>
> mentoring, (e) professional learning, and (f) reflection (p. 14).

These findings supported that if beginning teachers are provided with the right support and

professional development within their first five years, they are more likely to stay in the teaching

profession.

Mentoring

A successful mentoring program leads to career success and increased satisfaction for

teachers. Eisner (2015) used a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire to receive feedback on a

faculty mentoring program in New York. The goal of the research was to find the common

ground where both the district and the employees were satisfied with their professional

relationships. Eisner's reach found mentoring was directly associated with career success and

satisfaction (Eisner, 2015, p. 8). Eisner's research set up a tangible mentoring program model

that can be replicated to increase performance and satisfaction of the workplace. This research

supports the need for a structured mentoring program to make beginning teachers the most

successful in their position (Eisner, 2015).

Short, focused conversations between mentors and mentees are most effective and lead to

more immediate learning. Hairon et al. (2020) used surveys and focus group discussions to

research mentees' perspectives of their experience of mentoring. Fifty beginning teachers

participated in the research, revealing four important and necessary results for a strong mentoring program: structuredness, relevance, applicability, and workability. The four identified areas were perceived to contribute to significantly more success. Six practical areas of improvement were also discovered:

> The more immediate the learning (as opposed to non-immediate learning needs), simpler (as opposed to more complex), practice related (as opposed to abstractions), related the transfer to teachers' own classroom practice (as opposed to other teachers' classroom practices), and potential for impact on student learning, the greater beginning teachers' learning in a mentoring context" (Hairon et al., 2020, p. 119).

Mentoring needs to be taught earlier before teachers report for the school year, so they can be set up for success in their first years of teaching.

Guidance is provided for mentees through evaluations. Five mentors and 16 new special education teachers were included in a study by Israel et al. (2014) in an urban district in the Midwestern United States. Data was collected to investigate the evaluation structure within the mentoring programming in correlation to emotional and professional development for beginning teachers. According to the findings:

> Evaluation from the mentors provided guidance for mentors' feedback; emotional supports and professional supports were interrelated, wherein emotional supports occurred within the context of professional supports; and the majority of the new teachers did not indicate that the evaluation adversely affected their mentoring experience (Israel et al., 2014, p. 45).

In contrast, these teachers did not think their evaluations affected the experience with their mentors but provided guidance for immediate feedback.

Observing veteran teachers is highlighted as the most influential professional development activity. Martin et al. (2016) interviewed five beginning teachers in a diverse public school system in Hawaii, United States. At this public school system, there was a need for a more structured system of support for beginning teachers. The participants all experienced different interactions and spent differing amounts of time with their mentors. According to the participants, teacher observations made the biggest impact: "All five of the teachers in this study overwhelmingly highlighted observing experienced teachers as one of the most influential professional development activities throughout the whole year" (Martin, 2016, p. 6). The beginning teachers desired feedback and real-life observations within their district, which should be available for all new teachers.

Mentors benefitted from the mentoring program just as much as mentees. Mathur et al. (2013) collected research from 43 mentors and 41 newly hired mentees on the impact of their mentor relationship and experience. These teachers were in a large city in the Southwestern part of the United States, and data was collected through a 2x2 factorial ANOVA survey. The results from the survey, querying the year-long mentoring experience, found that mentors and mentees both grew professionally. Mathur et al. (2013) found:

> Mentors viewed themselves as more confident in teaching and more aware of evidenced-based practices than did mentees. They perceived themselves as having a comparatively higher ability to reflect and listen, engage, and motivate students, plan and implement lesson, and examine and adjust instruction than did mentees. Mentees viewed themselves as having more knowledge about classroom/district/assessments than mentors did (Mathur et al., 2013, p. 159).

Mentors were able to reflect on their own abilities, while mentees increased their knowledge of classroom and district practices from the mentor relationship and experience. These results express a need for a successful program to benefit both mentors and mentees alike.

School Leadership

The relationship between professional development and a principal's leadership influencing the role of teacher self-efficacy was studied by Gümüş & Bellibaş (2020), using a cross-sectional survey design with 130 Turkish principals as participants. The researcher's leading research was based on principals' extent of learning-centered leadership, professional development practices, and the principals' perceived self-efficacy in effect to their professional development. The researchers summarize their findings this way: "We found a positive, statistically significant yet weak relationship between principals' PD and their leadership practices, with self-efficacy playing a considerable mediating role" (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020, p. 1162). Principals who participate in the professional development school days use self-efficacy when determining professional development activities.

Positive administrator-teacher relationships affect school-wide climate. Pogodzinski (2015) studied the capacity and willingness of administrators to support beginning teacher induction. Their findings connected the administrators' effect to the school-wide climate of support for teachers to promote professional growth. Surveyed were 184 beginning teachers across 99 schools in the Midwestern United States were surveyed. This study identified the beginning teachers' perceptions of their working conditions and how frequently they interacted with their assigned mentors. The principal persona affected novice teachers' mentor experiences: "when novice teachers perceived positive administrator-teacher relations in their schools and reported that administrative duties did not interfere with their core work as teachers, they were

more likely to frequently interact with their mentors around issues of the curriculum"

(Pogodzinski, 2015, p. 40). A positive leader in the school district can be a great influence on the

mentoring program by promoting positive interactions with employees.

Positive school leadership increases teacher efficacy. Ramazan & Hanifi (2018)

conducted a study with 427 teachers to examine the relationship between school leadership

behaviors, teacher self-efficacy, and collective staff efficacy. This study of a school district in

Istanbul "revealed positive and significant relationships between school leadership, teacher self-

efficacy, and collective teacher efficacy. In addition, effective school leadership behaviors and

teacher self-efficacy perceptions were found to be positive and significant predictors of

collective teacher efficacy perceptions" (Ramazan & Hanifi, 2018, p. 550). School leadership has

a great impact on teacher self-efficacy and, in turn, student achievement.

A formal support system in a school district affects teachers' perseverance. In a study by

Colognesi et al. (2020), 37 men and 117 women with five or fewer years of teaching were

interviewed based on what support was offered to them as newly qualified teachers and what

their feelings of competence and perseverance was. Colognesi et al. (2020) hypothesized that, "a

formalized support system or having a mentor does not necessarily mean that newly qualified

teachers will progress in their professional development, feel more competent or demonstrate

more perseverance" (Colognesi et al. 2020, p. 261). The results of this quantitative study verified

the researchers' hypothesis that formal support positively affects teachers' competencies and

perseverance. This study could be further investigated by studying the role of the principal in the

workplace and how their role affects beginning teachers.

Supportive administrators can influence teacher retention. A study done by Redding et al.

(2019) surveyed and observed 64 teachers in 11 districts. These teachers had no prior teaching

experience and were all assigned to a mathematics course. The research intended to uncover to what extent administration is connected to teacher turnover and teacher quality. Administration and other school leaders can influence retention by supporting teaching quality. The findings supported that new teachers are less likely to turnover with supportive administrators, although "the influence of administrative support on teacher turnover does not appear to be driven by more supportive administrators improving a school's professional community, increasing teacher autonomy, or increasing the frequency of professional development and mentoring" (Redding et al., 2019, p. 798). School administration can support and lessen teacher turnover, but there was no data to support teacher quality being improved.

Pre-Service and Induction Programs

State funding and requirements affect local district decisions. In a study by Bartlett & Johnson (2010), teachers in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio were interviewed about their teacher induction programs. Bartlett & Johnson (2010) searched for the similarities and differences in the induction approaches across the three states. These states have linked induction policies and have passed induction legislation from 2005-2009, the four consecutive years before this research was published. From the findings, Wisconsin and Ohio have mandated induction state-wide and Ohio is one of 16 states in the United States to fund induction with state money (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010). These states have struggled with balancing state requirements and local district opinions and decisions.

Beginning teachers learned most through instructional collaboration. Cravens et al. (2017) conducted a study with close to one thousand teachers about a model used to provide structure and focus for teacher collaboration. The survey used queried teachers on what instructional practices are most improved by their mentoring program and how this program

influenced teacher trust, teacher efficacy, and teachers' sense of community in the school. The findings were encouraging, "teachers report higher levels of engagement in deprivatized practice and instructional collaboration" (Cravens et al., 2013, p. 526). From the findings, teachers reported the greatest changes were in modifying instructions, joint lesson planning, and developing a better understanding of their content area.

Strom et al. (2018) conducted a study of two science teachers to investigate the ways these teachers' practices aligned with their pre-professional program. Data was collected through observations and interviews throughout one semester of school. Strom et al. (2018) concluded that these science teachers' practices were hybrid, meaning both teachers negotiated with students on cooperation and participation to build trustworthy relationships. That study supported the findings that trust from students to teachers lead to successful participation rates in activities. Another strategy of trust was used by one teacher who shared his personal contact information, which led to open lines of communication for the students. Having a mentor to suggest such strategies was beneficial for both teachers. Strom (2018) found the following:

> Given that the first year of teaching is a period that profoundly influences teachers' practices as well as their decisions to remain in or leave the profession, districts and schools must create consistent and coherent induction programs that provide supports for new teachers, including appointing mentors who are qualified and appropriately matched to their mentees (p. 24).

These supports are needed for beginning teachers to bring new strategies into their classrooms that are specific to district needs and norms.

New teachers needed strategies for assessing student learning. Hudson et al. (2015) surveyed 32 final-year preservice teachers from an Australian University to analyze the

preservice program for new teachers. The focus of the survey was to support final-year preservice teachers in a school-based setting so the teachers would have a successful transition into their first teaching job. From the findings, all preservice teachers that were surveyed reported that they understood the role of a teacher, could communicate with students and colleagues, and had gained personal-professional skills (Hudson et al., 2015). Of the teachers surveyed, unfortunately, most of the teachers claimed they lacked the skills or strategies for assessing student learning. From these findings, it can be concluded that assessment of different student learners should be a focus for beginning teachers in their mentor training.

School Profile & Baseline

School Performance

In Northwest Iowa, the small rural school district of Boyden-Hull serves students from the communities of Hull and Boyden. In the 2021-2022 school year, 324 students were enrolled in Boyden-Hull's junior and senior high school (grades 7-12). The students were 75.9% white students, 21.9% Hispanic, and 2.2% multi-racial. Male students made up 50.6% of students, while females accounted for 49.4%. At Boyden-Hull, students are offered a variety of high school courses, ranging from common core to Career and Technical Education (CTE) course offerings, along with opportunities to take concurrent enrollment classes online through Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon, Iowa. According to the Iowa Department of Education in the 2020-2021 school year, Boyden-Hull Community School District's (CSD) junior high and high school (7-12) averaged achievement mathematics score was 51.5/100 and the average school achievement English Language Arts was 49.51/100. Boyden-Hull's overall performance scored 55.75/100 in 2021, surpassing the state average of 54.70/100 (State of Iowa, 2021).

Student & Community Characteristics

The junior and senior high school is in Hull, Iowa, which had a population of 2,284 people reported from the 2020 census; 94.21% of the population was white, 4.36% was of other races, 1.24% was two or more races, and 0.19% was Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The elementary school is in Boyden, Iowa, with a population of 658 from the 2020 census; 95.3% of the population was white, 4.47% was other race, and 0.23% was black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Parent Involvement

In the Boyden-Hull CSD, parents stay informed through accessibility to JMC, a student record management system, and Google Classroom, an educational platform. Parents can participate in parent-teacher conferences once a semester with the opportunity to talk with teachers about student behavior, student grades, or other school-related topics. Other involvement includes participating in advisory meetings for CTE, the Student Academic Integrity Committee (SIAC), the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), along with earning spots on the school board, music booster club, booster club, and specialty show choir booster club. Lastly, parents stay updated on school events by visiting the school website and school social media accounts. Parents play a vital role in students' education and can be used as a resource when used as a resource with proper communication.

School District Mission and Vision

Boyden-Hull's mission statement focuses on providing beneficial technology and career opportunities. Boyden-Hull bases their education on community service, patriotism, respect, and hard work. This district promotes parent involvement through enhanced learning and high moral

standards, believing all students can succeed with a positive learning environment made possible with community efforts (Boyden-Hull CSD).

Current Student Learning Goals

Students are assessed through annual testing and setting academic goals for their learning. MAPS (Measure of Academic Progress) and ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress) testing are used in Boyden-Hull's school district to assess student knowledge, along with iReady Math assessments during their 7th and 8th-grade years. All 7-12th grade students complete S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) goals each year. In the spring, students lead conferences with their homeroom teacher and their parents while talking through their portfolios, which are compiled of a self-evaluation, teacher evaluations, and class artifacts. Lastly, a current goal for students is increased social-emotional health via conversations led by the student council regarding topics that are not easily discussed in schools. The student council creates a presentation that homeroom teachers present each quarter on topics that students at the school believe are relevant to discuss, including depression/anxiety, distracted driving, suicide, and marijuana.

School Mentoring Characteristics

First-year teachers, second-year teachers, and new teachers to the district are each given various supports from the district as part of their induction, including a mentor assigned within the district and participation in a required Area Education Agency (AEA) mentoring program for first and second-year teachers. Mentors are paired with new teachers by administrators. Both brand-new teachers and teachers new to the district are assigned a mentor as a support system and resource. Mentors are not given direct or specific instruction on what to communicate to their mentees or how frequently to communicate with their mentees.

First-year and second-year teachers participate in a mentoring program through Northwest AEA. Over the course of two years, these beginning teachers and their mentors spend eight professional development days reviewing ethics, collaborating with their mentor teachers, and discussing various topics regarding educational curriculum. One purpose of this mentoring program is to help early teachers prepare for their standard license. After two years of teaching with an initial license, Iowa teachers may apply for their standard license. When applying for this license, these teachers are responsible for providing artifacts and evidence showing they have mastered the following eight standards of a quality teacher:

Standard 1: Demonstrates ability to enhance academic performance and support for implementation of the school district's student achievement goals.

Standard 2: Demonstrates competence in content knowledge appropriate to the teaching position.

Standard 3: Demonstrates competence in planning and preparing for instruction.

Standard 4: Uses strategies to deliver instruction that meets the multiple learning needs of students.

Standard 5: Uses a variety of methods to monitor student learning.

Standard 6: Demonstrates competence in classroom management.

Standard 7: Engages in professional growth.

Standard 8: Fulfills professional responsibilities established by the school district (Iowa Department of Education, 2018).

These eight training days with the AEA are spent analyzing one standard at a time, preparing first-year and second-year teachers to master these standards and prepare for submission of their standard teaching license in Iowa.

Teacher Instructional Strategies, Assessment Practices, and Professional Development

All teachers in the district have implemented APL (approach, practice, and learning) strategies in their classrooms. Teachers focus on attention, feedback, and repetition in their classrooms, a series of steps that increase learning for students. Agendas, objectives, and closures are prevalent and consistent from classroom to classroom in the K-12 district. Teachers grow professionally each Wednesday afternoon, participating in AIW (Authentic Intellectual Work) that integrates teacher collaboration to improve instruction. Staff also assesse at-risk students, collaborates on curriculum maps within departments, and prepares for parent-teacher conferences. Professional development half and full days have focused on mental health training and planning for individual professional development days.

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Needs Assessment

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At Boyden-Hull CSD, the induction process of beginning teachers and new teachers to the district has been inconsistent and lacking accountability. New teachers need an onboarding process that will set them up for success in the first responsibility of their classroom. Administrators have a great responsibility when partnering mentors and mentees together. Pogodzinski wrote, "The extent to which administrators recruit and appropriately assign effective veteran teachers has significant implications for mentoring program success" (Pogodzinski, 2015, p. 43). Currently, Boyden-Hull's mentoring program is minimal, and accountability is sporadic; the mentor relationships are not held accountable. The mentoring program should be improved because success of first beginning teachers should be a priority for students, teachers, staff members, and administrators. Success in the early years of teaching will increase students' success, teacher retention, and teacher confidence (De Clercq et al., 2021).

For most teachers, their first year can be intimidating and stressful. De Clercq (2021) states that "teaching has been identified as a highly demanding career with teachers prone to high levels of work-related stress and burnout" (p. 1). First-year teachers have the responsibility of setting up their classroom, planning curriculum, creating content for classes, and making decisions for their classroom before students even walk through their doors. For some teachers, this process is done with no help from school district members, while others are provided support before the school year starts. In either case, beginning teachers have a long "to-do list" before the school year starts. While these items are common for all teachers before the school year, beginning teachers and teachers new to school districts have other challenges they face. With a new school district comes different district policies, staff resources, expectations for students, rules for teachers, AEA support, and grading operating systems. This list can be overwhelming, adding to the stress and anxiousness of having kids join the classroom.

The current induction program at Boyden-Hull consists of two pre-school training days, assigned mentor relationships with veteran teachers, professional development with the district, and training days through the AEA throughout the school year. The new teachers in the district meet with administrators and instructional coaches before other staff members report to the school. The following topics are included in this two-day pre-service training: teacher and student handbooks, master contracts, work rules, work responsibilities, district expectations, technology resources, district forms, and board policies. New teachers also take part in a discussion with instructional coaches and other staff leaders. This conversation consists of instructional strategies that are implemented in the district and a discussion of any questions or concerns that new teachers may have about the district or administration.

Mentors are assigned based on departments, personalities, and schedules. Veteran teachers are picked and paired with new teachers in the district. If the new teachers are first- or second-year teachers, they and their mentors participate in the mentoring program led by the AEA. The training days prepare first- and second-year teachers to apply for their standard teaching license in Iowa. As mentioned above, there are eight teaching standards that teachers in Iowa must master and show evidence of mastery to apply for this license. Outside of these professional development days, mentors are held accountable only by themselves to check in on their mentees and offer support where they see a need. Meetings are often infrequent; they lack consistency and accountability.

A consistent and structured mentoring program is needed to minimize teachers' beginning teachers' stress and set them up for success. New teachers have a big list of responsibilities they need to get done before the start of the year in and outside of their classroom. While the current induction process includes pre-school training, assigned mentor relationships, professional development, and trainings days with the AEA, new teachers look to administrators, mentors, and co-workers for guidance in preparation of the new school year. Mentors are not held accountable for their frequency of visits and guidance with their mentees, which has led to the inconsistency in the current mentoring program.

School Data & Analysis

Data Collection

Data was collected from all mentees during the 2021-2022 school year at Boyden-Hull CSD. These K-12 educators ranged from their first-year teaching to their third-year teaching (see Figure 1). Eleven mentees were surveyed about their mentoring experiences and relationship with their district mentors through a Google Form survey at the beginning of April.

Figure 1

Number of Years Teaching Experience

How many years of teaching have you completed? (First year teachers would answer 0)
8 responses
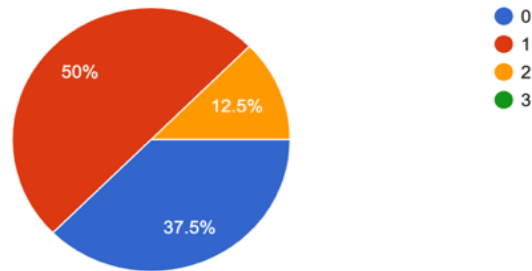
Mentees reported on the frequency of mentor check-ins, both academically (see Figure 2) and personally (see Figure 3). Check-ins were described as one-on-one conversations that happened formally or informally throughout the school day. 50% of mentees were checked in on weekly by their mentors for academic topics, 25% monthly, 12.5% quarterly, and 12.5% never (had not been checked in on once the school year).

Figure 2

Check-In: Academic

How often does your mentor check in on you regarding academic topics?
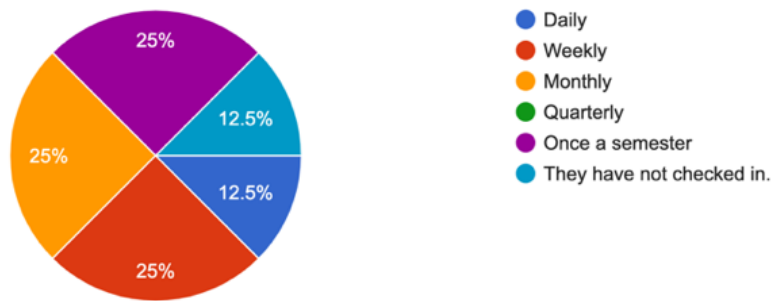8 responses
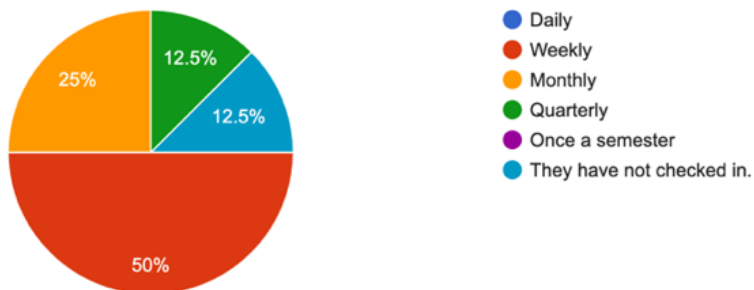
As to frequency of conversations about personal topics, the results were scattered among the options: once a semester, weekly, and monthly all held 25% each of the votes, while 12.5% talked daily with their mentors and 12.5% were not checked in on at all.

Figure 3

Check-In: Personal

The second section of the Google Form Survey listed training topics that new teacher mentees are often taught by mentors. The topics listed included school district norms, district expectations, curriculum preparation, and help with the grading system. In Figure 4, mentees selected from the following options: checked and helped with emergency substitute lesson plans, discussed PLC meetings, discussed classroom management plans, reviewed JMC grading, discussed formal observations, or were not taught any resources from the options. Results varied, as seen below, but no option was selected by more than five of the eleven mentees.

Figure 4

Pre-Service Training Resources

Check all of the following that your mentor has taught and/or guided you with.
8 responses

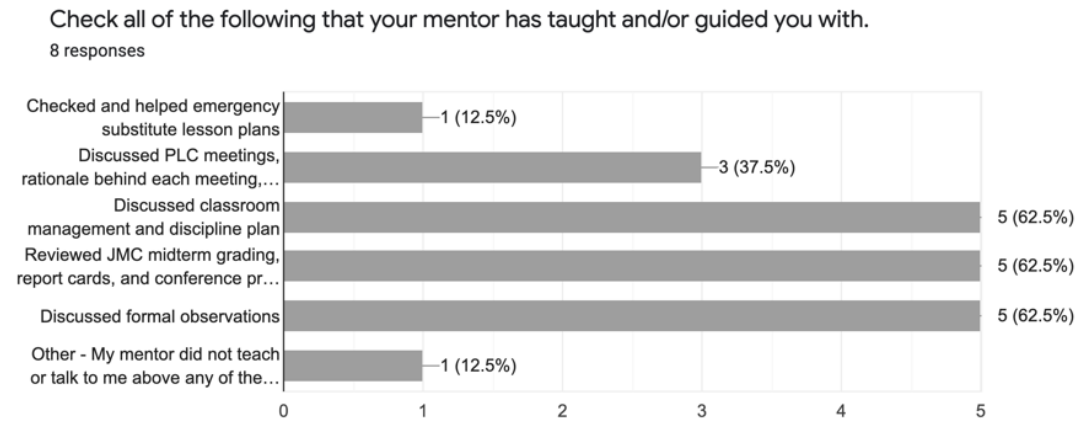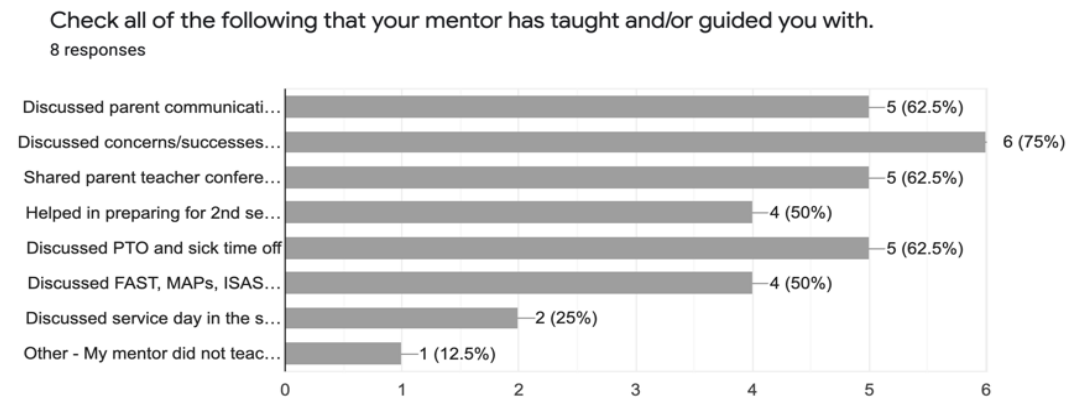| Category	Value
Checked and helped emergency substitute lesson plans	1 (12.5%)
Discussed PLC meetings, rationale behind each meeting,…	3 (37.5%)
Discussed classroom management and discipline plan	5 (62.5%)
Reviewed JMC midterm grading, report cards, and conference pr…	5 (62.5%)
Discussed formal observations	5 (62.5%)
Other - My mentor did not teach or talk to me above any of the…	1 (12.5%)

Figure 5 provided options that included discussing parent communication, discussing students concerns/successes, sharing parent teacher conference experiences, helping to prepare for second semester, discussing PTO and sick leave, discussing standardized testing, discussing service day in the spring, or not being taught any resources from the options. Results from this selection were more encouraging as there was more consistency among the options.

Figure 5

Pre-Service Training Resources

Check all of the following that your mentor has taught and/or guided you with.
8 responses

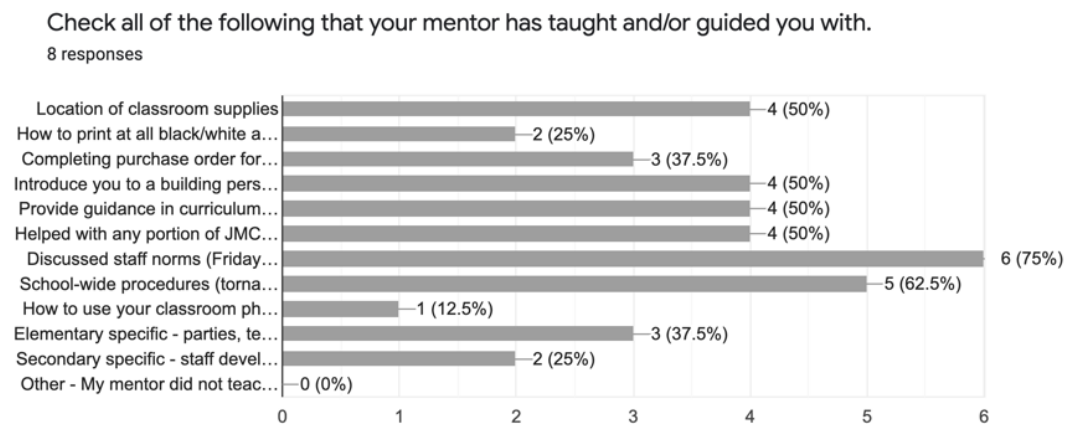| Category	Value
Discussed parent communicati…	5 (62.5%)
Discussed concerns/successes…	6 (75%)
Shared parent teacher confere…	5 (62.5%)
Helped in preparing for 2nd se…	4 (50%)
Discussed PTO and sick time off	5 (62.5%)
Discussed FAST, MAPs, ISAS…	4 (50%)
Discussed service day in the s…	2 (25%)
Other - My mentor did not teac…	1 (12.5%)

Lastly, Figure 6 addressed a beginning-of-the-year checklist that mentees should be taught in preparation for the school year to start. The list included the location of classroom supplies, access to all printers, completion of purchase orders, introduction to staff members, set-up JMC's grading system, staff norms, school-wide procedures, the classroom phone setup, elementary class parties, secondary staff development, or not being taught any resources from the options. Inconsistency was seen in the results as nine of the eleven options received less than half of the votes from the mentees.

Figure 6

Pre-Service Training Resources

Check all of the following that your mentor has taught and/or guided you with.

8 responses

Location of classroom supplies	4 (50%)
How to print at all black/white a...	2 (25%)
Completing purchase order for...	3 (37.5%)
Introduce you to a building pers...	4 (50%)
Provide guidance in curriculum...	4 (50%)
Helped with any portion of JMC...	4 (50%)
Discussed staff norms (Friday...	6 (75%)
School-wide procedures (torna...	5 (62.5%)
How to use your classroom ph...	1 (12.5%)
Elementary specific - parties, te...	3 (37.5%)
Secondary specific - staff devel...	2 (25%)
Other - My mentor did not teac...	0 (0%)

Mentees were also questioned with an open-ended survey through email, giving feedback on improvements for the Boyden-Hull mentor program and AEA program. Mentees were given the option to make suggestions for what could have better prepared them for their classroom. Mentees all agreed or mentioned that support should be given from all avenues in the school (administration, instructional coaches, mentors, and co-workers). But having to figure out school norms was a challenge for all beginning teachers without the guidance of a structured mentor relationship. One area for improvement that two mentees reported on through this survey was the additional time this program puts on their mentors. When their mentor is busy in school and

outside of school, mentoring seemed to be pushed back to the end of the "to do" list. They saw

how difficult it was for mentors to find time to communicate and build relationships with them as

mentees while seeing how it affected their relationship in retrospect. However, in all cases, when

a mentee approached their mentor, the mentors were receptive and able to help in all areas.

Mentees were asked open-ended questions regarding the AEA mentoring. Mentees

answered open-ended questions about the following topics: a typical mentoring training day,

strategies taught for their classroom, reflection on the benefits of the training days, and opinions

on changes that would improve the program better. All mentees who responded to these

questions reported not using any of the resources that were provided during their training days.

One mentee reported that the training essentially reviewed what was learned in college and was

not specific to their own classrooms.

Mentoring Challenges

All resources listed were resources specific to the whole school district. From the data

collected, strengths and weaknesses were analyzed. One finding is that Boyden-Hull CSD

mentees all experienced different communication and were taught different resources from their

mentors. Weaknesses in the Boyden-Hull CSD mentor relationship were apparent. Only one

applicant reported being taught how to use their classroom phone (see Figure 6) and were

provided an updated phone number list. Additionally, only one mentee reported having their

mentor check and help with emergency substitute lesson plans (see Figure 5). One applicant

reported that their mentor did not help with any of the options provided (see Figure 4 and Figure

5). From analyzing figures four, five, and six, the theme of inconsistency arose. Mentees have

been taught or given guidance to a wide variety of training resources, but there was not one

resource that all mentees selected being taught, which shows a lack of consistent preparation for

all new teachers to the district. Many of the resources were not being taught to mentees by their mentor, leaving mentees potentially unprepared in their classroom and for students.

Mentoring Strengths

A strength that the mentor relationships held from the mentees' viewpoint was the discussion of student concerns and successes and the discussion of staff norms (Friday attire, luncheons, social dues, treats, etc.). These two options received checks from 80% of the mentees. Several options were checked by 75% of the applicants: school-wide procedures (tornado drill, fire drill, intruder response, grading procedures, and/or attendance), discussion of classroom management and discipline plan, review of JMC midterm grading, report cards, conference preparation, formal observations, parent communication strategies, parent-teacher conference experiences, and PTO and sick time off.

Assessment Needs and Analysis

Through this data collection and analysis, Boyden-Hull CSD first-, second-, and third-year mentees were surveyed about their mentoring experiences and mentoring relationships. Mentees shared how often their mentors checked in regarding academic and personal topics. Mentees were also given a list of options regarding topics their mentors should have taught them as teachers new to the district. Results varied among all mentees who participated in the survey. One mentee did not have any communication with their mentor nor was taught anything by their mentor. There were mentees who spoke with their mentors daily and were taught numerous resources from the checklist. In summary, the inconsistency of mentor communication and guidance was significant in the district. There is a need for consistency among all mentors and accountability for these mentors so that all mentees can be successful in their beginning years at Boyden-Hull CSD.

Future research could assess the mentee and mentor relationship by conducting a focus group with both mentees and mentors. For this school improvement plan, data collection focused on the mentees' side of the relationship only. Mentors could provide their feedback and ideas as well to better meet the needs of both parties. Mentees were not asked about solutions; the questions focused on the problems of the current induction program. A focus group could be used to target these problems and decide on the best possible solution to improve the current mentoring program.

Action Plan

Strategies

After reviewing necessary and relevant literature, multiple themes were identified in support of this plan for an improved mentoring program at Boyden-Hull CSD. These themes included staff relationships, professional developments and orientation, observations, and the structuredness of the mentoring programs. Support should be given to new teachers through multiple avenues of relationships in the school district. These areas should include individual relationships, pedagogical knowledge, teacher perception of their perceived competence, mentoring, professional learning, and reflection (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Having a mentor who supports and guides mentees is crucial for mentees' success. In Kearney's research (2017), data collected indicated that mentoring was the most useful aspect of the orientation for beginning teachers. Mentees believed it was those relationships that were imperative in making them into better teachers (Kearney, 2017).

A critical aspect of a teacher's onboarding process is professional development and orientation. The day-to-day workings of a school are necessary items to cover during pre-service orientation days if the orientation is specific (Kearney, 2017). General assumptions can be made

as a beginning teacher, but guidance should be given within the first day of

orientation. Observation was another aspect of the mentoring program that can be greatly

beneficial for new teachers. Martin et al. (2016) found that "observing experienced teachers as

one of the most influential professional development activities throughout the whole year"

(Martin et al., 2016, p. 6). Observing and learning from a range of veteran teachers in the district

can be a great asset for new teachers. Along with the observation of veteran teachers, new

teachers should continue to be observed when they have their classrooms. Martin identified that

"the teachers' desire for feedback was congruent with current research on Generation Y, those

born between 1977 and 1995, suggesting that the new generation of teachers desires more

feedback from principals, mentors, and peers than did their veteran colleagues" (Martin et al.,

2016, pp. 8-9). As a new generation of teachers emerges into the profession, different needs will

need to be met in the mentoring program. Generation Y desires more assurance in the classroom,

and a mentoring program can easily provide that assurance to the benefit of teachers and

students.

Lastly, structuredness and consistency from all mentors is prevalent in a successful

program. Martin et al. (2013) found that the effectiveness of mentoring partnerships depended on

the frequency of contact and the match of a veteran teacher to a mentee. Martin saw the success

of a mentoring program that positively impacted student achievement. With a better mentoring

program, teachers' practices increased, along with their job satisfaction. With a more confident

teacher who can learn effective instructional practices, student achievement will increase greatly

(Martin et al., 2013, p. 161). In the study done by Hairon et al. (2020), four things were most

effective for mentees, qualities that can be implemented into Boyden-Hull CSD's mentoring

program: more structure, relevance, applicability, and workability. Weekly meetings with

mentors should be structured on short, centered topics that keep the conversation focused. Relevance is needed as college prepares teachers for any classroom, but district mentoring should prepare teachers for their classroom in their district. Authentic classroom experiences are more helpful than reading textbooks. Mentors want immediate feedback that can be useful, so having a welcoming relationship where teachers can bring struggles and be provided with immediate strategies and help is necessary. Teachers can assess what strategies work and can continue to try new ideas suggested by their mentor. The previous findings confirm that effective mentoring needs to be comprehensive, coherent, and sustainable (Hairon et al., 2020, p. 118). Consistency within the program leads to success that can build a sustainable program.

The mentoring model (see Figure 7) by Eisner (2015) can be used as a successful mentoring guideline. The model emphasizes the need to match the mentee with a tenured mentor who will support, provide guidance, and remain confidential through their structured mentoring meetings.

Figure 7

Win-Win Mentoring Model

Table 8: Summary - A Model For Win-Win Faculty Mentoring

Attribute	Operationalization
Goals and Objectives	Development, support, retention, acculturation, community
Program Communication	Documents, meeting calendar, and links are given to all faculty
Program Administration	Faculty approves program and selects faculty member to chair; participants are trained upfront; Dean/Chairs are included
Expectations for Participants	Pairs define salient outcomes within formal program guidelines
Attributes of Mentors	Mentors are tenured and not from mentee's department
Attributes of Mentees	Mentoring is formal years 1 and 2; it is informal years 3-tenure
Matching Mentor with Mentee	Dean and Search Chair are consulted re: mentee needs; 1st year mentor pairs are matched; 2nd year mentees request mentors
Meetings	Mentor pairs meet pre- or post- collective sessions for all faculty; mentor and mentee off-record observe each other teaching
Including Non-Paired Faculty	All tenured can mentor, all untenured can be mentored, all faculty can attend collective sessions, all sessions are confidential
Outreach	Co-host sessions with relevant standing Committees, include Dean and Department head in sessions that inform or recognize
Program Feedback	Survey participants anonymously at year-end, share results in annual report, debrief mentors and mentees 1-1 at midyear
Program Revision	Consider and continually implement all relevant suggestions

Steps to Solve the Problem

The following steps describe the integration of the new mentoring program at Boyden-Hull CSD. Starting in May of 2022, the mentoring program must first be approved by the administration, and veteran teachers should be selected as mentors for the 2022-2023 school year. The steps ensure consistency among mentors and demands accountability checks for the school year. Instructional coaches should keep mentors accountable by using the checklist (see Figure 8) to meet with mentors monthly.

1. Administrators assign tenured mentors to new teachers to the district.

2. Instructional Coaches teach and share resources with mentors (Figure 8).

3. Mentors meet with mentees before the school year starts to give a tour of the district and start checking things off their "checklist," along with having personal conversations.

4. Mentees meet with admin to go over pre-service district training.

5. Mentors take mentees out for lunch then spend the afternoon with them talking through their curriculum (assuring they have curriculum resources available) and assisting plans for classroom setup.

6. Mentees have a full day to work in their room; administration, instructional coaches, and mentors conduct periodic check-ins during the day.

7. Before the school year starts, mentors set up a schedule of when they will meet with their mentees each week (for 15 minutes) during the school year; conversations are focused and cover one or two topics from the checklist (Figure 8).

   a. Mentors also check on JMC grades to make sure grades are up to date each week, along with discussions about student's struggles/successes (offering help on classroom management), if applicable.

8. Mentors continue to guide mentees weekly through their first year in the district, checking items off the checklist each month (Figure 8, below).

9. Observations

   a. Instructional coaches observe the beginning teacher once a quarter, filling out an evaluation form of areas that could be improved and areas of success.

   b. Beginning teachers observe veteran teachers once a quarter and report what they learned to their mentors; mentors talk with them the week prior about one focus of instruction or classroom management they can observe (e.g., classroom management, students' relationships, activity strategies).

10. After the first year, mentoring meetings progress to monthly the following school year.

11. AEA meets four times a year for training over teacher standards; in teacher's 2nd year, mentors help mentees gather artifacts for their license application to the state of Iowa at the end of year two.

Figure 8

Monthly Mentor Checklist

AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER	*Location of resources* – classroom supplies, copy machines, office supplies, and other resources *Forms* – purchase orders, mileage forms *Introduce mentees to other staff* – teachers, office staff, custodians, instructional coaches, tech support, elementary specials teachers *Schedules* – first day/week activities, Wednesday PLC schedule, various bell schedules *APL lesson format* – agenda, objectives, bell ringer, exit ticket *Curriculum resources* – teachers are supplied with curriculum guides for the first courses they teach, teacher editions of books, and supplementary resources *JMC* – teachers learn to log in to JMC, set up grade book and grade cut-offs, record grades, looking up student information, report attendance *Technology* – laptops, Apple TV's, Smart Boards are working; access to all printers/copiers, Weblink (show teachers how to submit a leave form), can log into various sites

	Staff Norms – attire, Friday leave time, Homecoming and dress up days, treats in the lounge, luncheons, social dues *Information on procedures* – attendance, grading procedures, common area expectations, tornado drill, fire drill, and intruder *Show important websites* – tech support, google drive, school website, TLC booking website, JHHS shared folder *Secondary testing* – how to administer and set-up MAP testing, iReady account for ELA teachers *Professional Development* – show teacher where they can find staff development and conferences information *Other* – access to teacher handbook and master contract, get an updated phone number list, paperwork for taking any classes, tour of building, mandatory reporting, Comet Time Expectations, sub forms when subbing for another teacher *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee
OCTOBER	*Lesson Plans* – emergency lesson plans are in place, encourage the teacher to have lesson plans for 2-3 days *Observing* – observe each other's classrooms one time for the AEA mentoring program between October and December *PLC* –PLC meetings rationale behind these meetings *Classroom Management* – management plan and discipline strategies *Review grading and quarterly assessments* – how to enter grades, report cards on JMC, conference process, mid-term grade reporting *Parent/Teacher Conferences* – how to conduct conference, handling parent issues, and what to prepare *Administration observations* – formal observations or upcoming observations *Praise* – acknowledge your mentee
NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER	*Holidays* - Busy both professionally and personally it is between Thanksgiving and Winter break and how to keep the students engaged and productive, district and school holiday events and local happenings *Snow Days* - Review snow day procedures and how they will be notified *Mentor/Mentee Observations* – Share information from observations of each other *Other* –parent communication, concerns/successes of students, share with one another your parent teacher conferences experience *Upcoming* –changes the teacher wants to make for second semester, lane advancement *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee
JANUARY	*End of semester* – end of the semester procedures, review how to do grades and report cards, the highs and lows of the semester, any changes for the second semester *Secondary: Student-Led Conferences Preparation* – remind mentee to talk to their classes and Comet Time about adding work to their My Portfolio Drive *Classroom Management* –strategies for working with struggling students

	Parent Communication - home communication and ideas to strengthen home/school connections (postcards home, e-mail, newsletters, notes, remind app) *Upcoming Assessments* – MAP testing, iReady, CogAT, ISASP *Mentor/Mentee Meetings* – establish time for mentor/mentee meeting for second semester *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee
FEBRUARY	*Mentor/Mentee* – schedule a time for observations of each other's classroom/other teachers' classroom *Upcoming* –upcoming conferences, Secondary: different conference format from the fall. Teachers evaluate students prior to these dates. Students should continue to add to their My Portfolio Drive., Review upcoming district and building activities, upcoming March/April Professional Development, learning resources to suggest to parents when asked how they can help support their student's learning over the summer *ISASP* - the state testing procedure and schedule, and rules for students *Professional Development* - Share professional organizations, workshops, or classes that may be of interest to your mentee *Secondary: Spring Service Day* - Explain Spring Service Day done in their Comet Time groups. The principal has a list of places to work at - can start to collect ideas of work needing to be done. *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee
APRIL	*Parent communication* – continued partnership with parents through communication *Mentor/Mentee* - observations of mentee's classroom. Keep criticism constructive, highlight improvements and things they do well, provide references to people, websites or books that may assist them in preparing for next year, their visit to another teacher's classroom. Inquire what they liked, what might work for them, observations about how the teacher related to the students, strategies for dealing with spring fever *Upcoming* - Make sure they are aware of ordering procedures for the upcoming year, Supplies list: make sure they know how to add or take off supplies from their list, review upcoming district and building events *Summer School* – summer school, how students are selected, etc. *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee
MAY	*Mentor/Mentee* – goals, think about ideas for next year *Elementary End of Year Activities* – last day picnic, district and building level activities *Secondary End of Year Activities:* high school semester test preparation and schedule, field trips *JMC* – Cover how to do final grades *End of the Year* – Inventory for end of year and teacher check out procedure *Praise* - acknowledge your mentee

Implementation of the Plan

Timeline

For the successful integration of this new mentoring program, a thorough timeline had to be created and executed for successful integration. Administrators must approve the updated mentoring program before the end of the 2021-2022 school year. Veteran mentors will then be chosen before August 2022 to match the new staff members. Once these veteran mentors are approved, district leaders will train the chosen mentors for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year before the staff reports to school in August. Pre-serve training will be scheduled before August 2022 to be conducted two days before all staff must report for the school year. In August 2022, new staff, district leaders, and mentors will report for pre-service training. During the school year, ongoing accountability checks will be conducted with mentors by instructional coaches monthly. Assessment tools, such as Google Forms, will be used to keep mentor and mentee relationships accountable and to collect data regarding the new program in hopes of improving the program each school year. District leaders, mentors, mentees, and the Northwest AEA all have a vital role in the success of this mentoring program.

Staff Responsibilities

Administrators and District Leaders

Administrators, including the superintendent and two building principals, will review the proposed mentoring plan for the integration of the 2022-2023 school year. District leaders, including building instructional coaches and technology integrationists, will meet before the end of the 2021-2022 school year to help assign veteran mentors to new teachers in the district, while also scheduling the 2022-2023 pre-service onboarding days before August. Instructional coaches will be responsible for ensuring mentors fulfill and execute their duties of weekly

communication and teaching mentees items from the monthly checklist. Instructional coaches will meet with mentors on the first Monday of each month to assess what has been completed from the checklist by the mentors. Administration and district leaders are crucial in the leadership of the mentoring program, assuring consistency is kept from mentor to mentor.

Mentors

A special day of training will be conducted in August 2022 to roll out this new program. During this one-day training, mentors will be guided through the checklist (Figure 8, above) and be given the necessary resources before meeting their mentee. During this training, mentors can ask questions and collaborate with district leaders on their plans to ensure mentees have the best experience possible. Mentors will leave the training with direction on what their first day with their assigned mentee will look like and a plan for when they will meet with their mentee weekly. This training, before mentees report to the school, is a way for mentors and school leaders to be well-prepared and strengthen the consistency of the mentoring program. During the school year, mentors will lean on school leaders for support if needed during the year but will rely heavily on the monthly checklist to guide their mentoring conversations. For accountability, the checklist will be available on a Google Spreadsheet with a column marked "Date completed," where mentors will date when they discussed the specific items on the list. Instructional coaches will also date when they observe the mentees and date when they provide feedback through a formal conversation with the mentees.

Mentee

Mentees will report to school in August 2022 two days before all staff is to report. Mentees will participate in district onboarding training with administrators and building principals, discussing their master contracts and work duties, and exploring the school and

student handbook. Mentees will be introduced to their mentors and discuss the schedule and

expectations for the school year. Mentors will inform mentees of their weekly meeting time and

the online checklist that will guide their discussions each week. After discussing the school year,

mentors will assist mentees in classroom preparation, including classroom setup, classroom

management, and preparing curriculum.

AEA

The Northwest AEA will meet with mentors and mentees a total of eight times for the

first two years of their teaching career. If teachers are new to the district but are not first- or

second-year teachers, they will not participate in the training by the Northwest AEA but will

instead be assigned a mentor in the district and participate in Boyden-Hull's mentoring program.

First- and second-year mentees will attend these training days to grow professionally and

strengthen their relationships with their mentors.

Data Collection

At the end of the school year, mentees will complete a survey through Google Forms to

gather data on their experience with the Boyden-Hull CSD's mentoring program. This survey

will identify strengths and areas of growth for the program to keep progressing through the years.

School leaders and mentors will meet once the survey is completed to discuss their experiences

and analyze the results. From their discussion, changes and adjustments can be made for the next

school year in hopes of increasing the success of the mentoring program. Data again will be

collected through Google Forms to ensure documentation on where the program could be

strengthened.

Barriers and Challenges

A barrier in every aspect of school, and specifically in this plan, is the demand for time. School leaders, instructional coaches, mentors, and mentees will have to find time for this mentoring program to be successful. Instructional coaches, mentors, and mentees will have to be flexible in the coordination of observation times throughout the school year, along with the weekly meetings required during this program. An additional challenge that education is facing is a teacher shortage: "Teacher shortages, increasing numbers of English language learners, low-performing urban schools, and the rising enrollment of students with disabilities and other special needs are just some of the factors that make dynamic, well-trained, highly qualified teachers more necessary than ever" (Reitman & Karge, 2019, p. 8). With the overwhelming stress that COVID-19 placed on school systems across the country, along with increased needs from students, teaching has become a less attractive career path. Reitman & Karge (2019) emphasize the struggle that schools will face in retaining highly qualified teachers. A successful mentoring program can increase the skills of beginning teachers and help retain qualified teachers.

Conclusion

Through support from district leaders, instructional coaches, and veteran teachers, a mentoring program can be successful with a consistent plan among mentors. "The first 3 years of a teacher's career is considered to be the most critical to their success and retention" (Shockley et al., 2013, p. 362). Mentees can be prosperous in their beginning years of teaching with the correct guidance through a strong mentoring program. Boyden-Hull CSD will see success from their beginning teachers and connectively from their students through this intentional, specific, and accountable induction plan.

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