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## **Improving Support for Teachers to Increase Teacher Retention: A School Improvement Plan**

Beth Jaeger

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**Improving Support for Teachers to Increase Teacher Retention:**

**A School Improvement Plan**

Beth Jaeger

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

### **Abstract**

Research shows that strong mentoring programs are needed to support new teachers and to retain teachers in a district. Studies have been conducted and documented the effect of administration's role and support of a mentoring program, the mentor and mentee relationship, effective mentoring practices, professional development for mentors, teacher retention, and induction programs. A school improvement plan for Starmont Community School District was created to revise an existing mentoring program with a goal of developing stronger mentors and greater teacher retention. The current mentoring program was improved to create stronger professional development for mentors, focused monthly meeting goals and accountability for mentors and mentees, greater interaction from administration, and more consistency for pre-service days for mentees.

*Keywords:* new teacher, mentoring, mentor, mentee, administration, leadership, induction program, professional development

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## **Improving Support for Teachers to Increase Teacher Retention:**

### **A School Improvement Plan**

Maintaining a strong, consistent, teacher workforce in a school district is viable for the success of the district and students who attend the district. According to the data from Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) the top concepts are related to teacher retention. Research states that mentor teachers play a vital role in new teacher learning and support (van Ginkel et al., 2015). According to Morettini (2016), research states that one of the reasons first- year teachers decided to stay was due to the mentoring services given despite the many challenges they faced. The mentor and mentee relationship and proximity to one another is directly connected to teacher retention (Wold et al., 2023). Research also states that administrator involvement in a mentoring program is vital to creating a supportive environment for mentors and new teachers (Kutsyuruba, 2020). Researchers have explored the effects a strong mentoring program has on teacher retention and examined what is needed to support and retain teachers. When evaluating five years of data, 2018-2023, Starmont Community School District has a retention rate of 85%. The problem is the lack of a solid mentoring program that supports new teachers for teacher retention at the Starmont Community School District. Teacher retention has been a growing concern across America, and it has increased since COVID. Although this is a national problem, it has hit many urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Teacher retention is a growing concern for Starmont Community School District. This problem impacts both the school and student learning because new teachers need to learn curriculum, school expectations, and school initiatives. New staff are beginning to develop relationships with staff members. Building a strong mentoring program that supports new teachers as they enter the school district will target the need to offer a level of support that new teachers need in a new district. Mentors will bridge the gap between

administration and new teachers. Teachers report that when entering a new district and being supported by mentors and administration, they are more likely to stay in a school district (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

This school improvement plan is to build a solid mentoring program supported by research-based practices. The program will select experienced teachers and agree to participate in continuous professional development that will develop their skills as mentors. Mentees will be supported for one to two years in the district and engage in professional development with their mentor. It is the author's goal that mentees will feel supported by administration and mentors and choose to stay with the school district as a direct result of the strong mentoring program.

Research material for this project's literature review was collected through accessing DeWitt Library of Northwestern College and Google Scholar. All articles were published within the past ten years and were peer reviewed. The author's focus of article collection was the impacts of mentoring programs on staff new to the district, both novice and experienced teachers. Articles were collected that focused on teacher retention, administration support, and qualities of a strong mentor. Studies on mentor programs and teacher retention have dramatically increased in ten years, and common themes were found in many of the articles collected. Through conducting this research, it is evident of the need for quality mentor programs that support the whole teacher. This support is a direct connection between a teacher leaving or staying with a district.

The belief is that new teachers to the district will have a higher retention rate with the support of a strong mentoring program. The author has organized a literature review with key themes that relate to an effective mentor program. The literature review will begin with discussing the importance of professional development for mentors. Next, the literature review

will focus on administrative support to mentors and mentees. Then the literature review will review the importance of the mentor and mentee relationship. Finally, the literature review will focus on effective practices that mentees have stated were most supportive when in the mentoring program.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Professional Development for Mentors**

Mentor teachers are tasked with supporting a new professional in the teaching profession or an experienced teacher new to a school district. Professional development for mentors impacts the work they do with their mentees. According to the findings, mentor teachers need additional skills to be successful as a mentor, and once taught these skills need to practice these skills (Jacobson et al., 2020). In North Dakota, the North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS) Mentoring Program is designed to train experienced teachers to mentor first-year teachers. The program offers a two-day training for all new mentors and supports mentors throughout the school year. Jacobson et al. (2020) explain that the NDTSS requires mentor teachers to participate in two types of activities that promote continuous reflection and feedback, through observations and one-on-one conferences. During the year, a mentor and teacher meet fifteen times each semester and engage in a Reflect-Focus-Plan-Implement cycle (RFPI). The mentor and first-year teacher also focus on the practice of watching a video recording of themselves and reflecting on the recording.

New teacher data was collected from 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 school years of teachers who had a mentor that was enrolled in the NDTSS Mentoring Program show that there was a three-year rate of retention of 88.3% and those who were not mentored in NDTSS Mentoring Program had a 77.2% retention rate (Jacobson et al., 2020). According to the findings involving mentors and teachers who were part of the NDTSS Mentoring Program analysis it was indicated that teachers who participated in the NDTSS Mentoring Program were retained at an 11% greater rate than teachers who did not participate in the mentoring program. Further, the rate of retention for NDTSS participants is 6% more than the overall retention rate for all North Dakota teachers over the three years analyzed in the study (Jacobson et al., 2020).



There is a need for mentors to be part of a mentoring program and further findings will inform and guide future planning for professional development, mentor support, and program outreach (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Mentor teachers grow both professionally and personally from their relationship with new teachers. According to the research (Walters et al., 2019) mentor teachers viewed the relationship between themselves and the new teacher as meaningful professional development and experienced professional growth concerning their own teaching identity and teaching practice. Two mentor teachers were recruited to mentor a small group of pre-service teachers, and each mentor had a history of working as a mentor teacher. During the study, each mentor kept a written and audio-recorded journal of their experience over 12 weeks (about 3 months) and Walters et al. (2019) spent time analyzing the entries. The findings indicate that these experienced teachers, in their role as mentors, felt they experienced a valued form of professional development and mentors viewed professional development of this nature as learning that would result in a positive change to their teaching practice. It was determined that professional development occurred during mentorship as the mentors reflected on and shared their teaching practices. Both mentors followed during the study stated that the mentoring relationship provided them with professional development opportunities, and both indicated that they felt more professional development in the context area of mentoring was needed (Walters et al., 2019). This study provides insight into the need for professional development for mentors and the benefits mentoring has on mentor teachers.

Teachers' professional development is a continuous process, and a mentor is a professional who has experience in the education field. Mentors offer their mentees many advantages due to their experience, professional status, knowledge of the organization, and

influence (Constantinescu, 2014). 102 mentor teachers were surveyed in Romania by Constantinescu (2014), and all interviewed completed a mentor training course before mentoring. The results of the research found that training was necessary for mentors. The collected data lead to the following conclusions to become mentors, teachers should complete specific training that includes effective communication, teacher methodology, career counseling, active listening skills, competencies in evaluating beginning teachers' activities, and more practical activities than theoretical activities and these findings support the need for a formal program that trains mentors and continues to support mentors through the mentoring process (Constantinescu, 2014).

Mentor education for mentor teachers improves the quality of the mentoring for the mentor and the mentee. An analysis of ten studies that conducted research on mentor education for mentors reveals a common theme of the importance for mentors to continue to develop their mentoring skills through participation in continuing mentor education (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015). The findings from the ten studies analyzed focus on several types of mentor education. According to Aspfors & Fransson (2015) the several types of mentor education include ongoing professional development with mentor groups meeting each month, online mentor courses, combinations of short courses, workshops, action research projects, school development projects, and sustained support while mentoring. These diverse types of mentor education show the variety of professional development offered to mentors to support their needs. The researchers stress the importance of mentor education that is research-informed, long-term and develops mentors' understanding of teaching and mentoring Aspfors & Fransson (2015).

### **Administrative Support**

In a study by Ford et al. (2019), over 15,000 teachers from 73 schools in an urban Midwestern school district were interviewed during one school year. A multilevel path analysis was used to study relationships between the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational dimensions of teacher psychological needs. The researchers analyzed the affective states, mood, or emotions of teachers, and their different states of burnout, organizational commitment, and intent to leave the profession. According to the findings, one of the main factors that kept teachers in the profession was a moderate to strong connection with an administrator and, most importantly, positive teacher-principal interactions. Finally, the evidence also shows that teachers who had more high-quality and frequent interactions with leaders had a higher frequency of teacher commitment. The importance of support studied illustrates that administrators need to address all three dimensions of the teachers' psychological needs to ensure that the district has a strong, stable teaching force (Ford et al., 2019).

The findings that administrative support affects whether a teacher will stay in a district were also mirrored in a research study conducted in twenty-five rural public-school districts in New York State (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). According to the study conducted by Frahm and Ciana (2021), the results showed that relationships between principals and teachers affected teacher retention rates. While each study was conducted in different settings with Ford et al. (2019) occurring in an urban setting and Frahm and Cianca (2021) occurring in a rural setting, both studies agreed that new educators want guidance when entering the district and look to administration to provide that guidance. Frahm and Cianca (2021) also determined from their study that superintendents are an additional layer of support that new teachers need, and superintendents' behaviors affect teachers in districts. The results of this study remind school administrators that time needs to be spent on developing active strategies for building

relationships, recognizing achievement among staff, and encouraging desirable work environments (Frahm and Cianca, 2021).

School administrative support is one factor in retaining teachers according to new teachers, and mentor teachers have also expressed the same level of support is needed for them from administrators as they mentor new teachers. These findings were reflected in two separate research studies conducted by Pogodzinski (2015) and Kutsyuruba (2020). Pogodzinski (2015) interviewed 184 teachers who had been in the teaching profession for three or fewer years from eleven districts in two Midwestern states. According to the results, positive interactions with administrators resulted in more frequent and positive interactions with mentors, and negative or few interactions with administrators resulted in fewer interactions with mentors according to teachers (Pogodzinski, 2015). In contrast, Frahm and Cianca (2021) found that while administrative support was important, teachers also stated that the support of their mentors was just as or more important when deciding to stay in a district. In other words, administrative support and mentor support are deciding factors when new teachers are deciding to stay in a district.

Mentor teachers also need a support system as they support new teachers. This structured support system begins with administration. A research study conducted by Kutsyuruba (2020) examined school administrators' engagement in creating a structure of supporting mentors and new teachers in four induction programs in the United States. Data was collected from the New Teacher Center (NTC) in Santa Cruz, CA which supports four induction programs in the United States. The results of the data collection and analysis revealed that teachers and mentors had mixed perceptions of administration support (Kutsyuruba, 2020). Findings show that the mentoring process between beginning teachers and mentors is the most beneficial and helpful

aspect of the mentoring induction program, but school administrators' leadership and commitment to the success of the induction and mentoring program was significant (Kutsyuruba, 2020). The findings from these recent studies conclude that administrative support affects teacher and mentor relationships, and teacher retention.

### **The Mentor and Mentee Relationship**

Understanding how to build the mentor/mentee relationship from the beginning is critical, and a study by Constantinescu (2014) addressed how understanding multiple intelligences was important for both the mentor and mentee. Over the course of one school year, 38 teachers, 14 mentors, and 14 beginning teachers, were interviewed and asked to rank each of Howard Gardner's eight multiple intelligences in order of importance to the mentoring process. According to the results, mentors indicated their dominant type of intelligence: interpersonal, logical-mathematical, and linguistic. Mentees indicated their dominant type of intelligence: interpersonal, spatial, logical-mathematical, linguistic, and intrapersonal (Constantinescu, 2014). Using the Theory of Multiple Intelligence could provide structure for both the mentor and mentee as they develop their relationship.

A positive mentor and mentee relationship is vital to the success of a school's mentoring program and teacher retention. In a study by van Ginkel et al. (2015), 726 mentors were asked to fill out a questionnaire with 48 statements which assessed mentoring goals and intentions, beliefs about sources of learning to teach, and beliefs about the nature and process of teacher knowledge and learning. For each question, the response was based on a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, disagree more than agree, disagree as much as agree, agree more than disagree, agree, strongly agree) (van Ginkel et al., 2015). Results show that mentor beliefs and the mentor-mentee matchup are two main factors that shape the mentor-mentee relationship.

Moreover, mentors who held a development view of learning and chose to engage in mentoring activities had a stronger motivation to engage with mentees (van Ginkel et al., 2015). In other words, a mentor who is motivated to learn will be motivated to build and shape a relationship with a mentee.

Similar findings to support the mentor and mentee relationship were revealed by Lozinak (2016) when researching the importance of mentor matching. The quality of the pairings has a significant impact on teacher retention. In this study, 33 new hires and 36 mentors in Connecticut completed online surveys, interviews, and participated in observations where data was collected that examined the mentor and mentee pairing. The results of the research revealed that the pairing process was unclear to both mentors and mentees, and this affected their confidence in the process of pairing mentors and mentees (Lozinak, 2016). Analysis of the data indicated it was important for both mentors and mentees to understand the pairing process, be in the same school, and have the same or similar schedule. This data supports the importance of “providing a mentor in the same school to improve the induction process because the accessibility of the mentors to the mentees created a stronger sense of support” (Lozinak, 2016). In other words, mentors and mentees value their relationship and want to be near each other.

The importance of pairings in a mentorship program was mirrored in a study of 217 new teachers and 114 mentor teachers in a rural Midwestern state during the 2019-2020 school year (Wold et al., 2023). The survey contained thirteen total questions, and eight were used for the study. According to the survey results new teachers identified having a mentor in the same content area as the most important (34.6%) and being in the same building (32.7%) as the second most important (Wold et al., 2023). In contrast, according to Wold et al. (2023), mentor teachers stated that being in the same building was the most crucial factor (41.2%) and the second most

principal factor was similar content (34.2%). In other words, mentors and new teachers prefer to be in the same building and the same content area and can use this as a foundation to build their relationship.

Peer support is one critical factor connected to teacher retention in a study conducted by Reitman and Dunnick Karge (2019). Interviews were held with 60 teachers in an induction program that held monthly cohort meetings in the United States. Each teacher in the program also had a mentor who visited their classroom once a month and was available for individualized support. Each interview was coded and analyzed, and common themes emerged from the interviews. In comparison to previous studies, the most crucial factor to a new teacher was individual relationships with mentors and support received from the mentor (Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). This support could be in the form of emails, on-site visits, or a 24/7 hotline. These recent studies have provided insight into the importance of the mentor/mentee relationship and its connection to teacher retention.

### **Effective Mentoring Practices**

In a study by Bang and Luft (2014), an online mentoring program in the southwest region of the United States with 22 pairs of mentors/mentees were evaluated based on a scoring rubric adapted from the e-Mentoring for Student Success, and from this group, two cases were selected for an in-depth study. Results indicated that both mentors and mentees expressed it was hard to stay on top of written dialogue and would prefer to be able to talk to someone (Bang & Luft, 2014). Mentees stated mentors were supportive, the Internet gave them a way to successfully collaborate with someone in the same content area, and mentees valued having a mentor in the same content area (Bang & Luft, 2014). Overall, mentees want to be supported, and while an

online mentoring program was not ideal, it did provide the needed support for mentors and mentees.

Research has shown that mentees have reported expectations of what they want from a mentor. In the study by Polikoff et al. (2015) 48 teachers from ten different urban, suburban, and rural districts in Kentucky, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey were part of an online mentoring program. Over five years mentor and mentee teacher pairs were evaluated based on a scoring rubric during their first year of mentoring or teaching. According to Polikoff et al. (2015), the results show that new teachers want a mentor who is familiar with the curriculum, and district, located in the same school building for maximum interactions and support, and have time to meet with their mentor during the day if needed. In contrast, Bang, and Luft (2014) found that an online mentoring program provided mentees with the same level of support as an in-person mentoring program, and mentees in this program were satisfied with the level of support received. In other words, mentees want to be supported by mentors and have found both in-person and virtual mentoring to be successful.

Mentees have expectations of mentors, and certain practices have a significant impact on mentees' experience and teacher retention. A study conducted by Morettini (2016) provides insight into what support mentees want from mentors. In the United States, thirteen new teachers were part of a study with data collection occurring in three phases: beginning of year, mid-year, and end of year. Each participant had an individual interview, along with open open-ended survey of each participant, document analysis, and analytic memos. The findings revealed that mentees found reflection time with mentors to be significant, mentees valued group sessions with other mentees, were encouraged by social and moral support from mentors and identified



mentors as valuable supporters. In other words, mentees want support from mentors and have indicated specific expectations of mentors.

Feedback is a critical part of the mentoring process. Mentees want quality feedback from mentors, and this was indicated in a study conducted by McGraw and Davis (2017). In three Australian rural schools eleven teachers and eleven mentor teachers were interviewed with open-ended questions that focused on the quality of feedback teachers received from mentor teachers. The research found that mentors who used inquiry orientation with open-ended questions and used notes from observations for conversations resulted in mentees reflecting on their teaching. (McGraw & Davis, 2017). This data supports the findings from the previous studies that mentees want a quality relationship with their mentor, that includes best research practices.

A recent study by Smith Washington (2022) evaluated what qualities and practices mentees want mentor teachers to exhibit. The research was conducted in New York state and mentees were asked through an interview process what they wanted from a mentoring program. Mentees overwhelmingly agreed that they wanted a mentor who was in the same curriculum area, same building, and had a common planning time that was the best fit for the new teacher (Smith Washington, 2022). The findings in this study compare with previous studies by Polikoff et al. (2015) and McGraw & Davis (2017) that indicated mentees want mentors who have an excellent work ethic, effective communication skills, are approachable, follow established state standards for mentors, and have time management. In other words, mentees want a mentor who is professional, dedicated, and committed to mentoring.

## **School Profile and Baseline**

### **School Performance**

Starmont Community School District is a small rural school district in northeast Iowa. The district serves the communities of Strawberry Point, Lamont, and Arlington. The school is in the middle of the country at the intersections of Highway 3 and Highway 187 and is one campus building that houses preschool through twelfth grade. The school also has an onsite daycare for children six weeks to preschool age and is in operation during the school year. According to the Iowa School Performance Profile, in the 2022-2023 school year, 550 students were enrolled in Starmont's elementary, middle, and high school (grades PreK-12). The students were 93.3% white, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.9% multi-racial, and 0.2% Black/African American. Male students made up 52% of students, and females accounted for 48% of the students, with no students identifying as non-binary. English language learners account for 0.5% of the student population PreK-12 and 46.7% of students are labeled as low socio-economic status. According to the Iowa Department of Education in the 2022-2023 school year, Starmont's combined grades 3-11 average school achievement mathematics score was 49.97/100 and the average English Language Arts achievement score was 49.3/100. Starmont's overall performance for elementary was 50.55/100, middle school 61.54/100, and high school 54.53/100.

### **Student and Community Characteristics**

Starmont Community School District combined three communities, Strawberry Point, Lamont, and Arlington in 1964. The school is at the intersection of Highway 3 and Highway 187 in Fayette County, Iowa. According to US Census Bureau (2021) data, Strawberry Point had a population of 1,267, Lamont 431, and Arlington 418. The ethnic groups in Strawberry Point in 2021 according to the US Census Bureau (2021) are white 97.6%, and 3.4% are the other races,

Lamont ethnic groups are 98.3% white and 2.7% are other races, and Arlington ethnic groups are 98.8% white and 1.2% are the other races.

### **Parent Involvement**

Parents in the Starmont Community School district stay informed through access to PowerSchool, a student record management system, and Google Classroom, an educational platform. Parents of elementary students must take part in parent-teacher conferences in October and March which allows parents to talk with teachers about student achievement, grades, behavior, and other topics. Elementary school had an average of 98% participation by parents during the 2022-2023 school year. Parents of middle school and high school students have an opportunity to talk with teachers at parent-teacher conferences in October and March, with an average of 32% parent participation during the 2022-2023 school year. Parents can also be involved in the Student Academic Integrity Committee (SIAC), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and volunteering at the school. There are also opportunities to be on the school board, coach youth teams, and be parent supporters for various organizations at the middle school and high school levels. Finally, parents can stay updated on school events by following the school's Facebook page, visiting the school website, communications from teachers via email and newsletters, and coverage in the local newspapers. There are many ways for parents to stay informed and be involved in their child's education.

### **School District Mission and Vision**

Starmont Community School District's mission is to empower all students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for responsible, productive, fulfilling lives (Starmont CSD). Starmont's vision is to improve student achievement through grand expectations,

academic emphasis, frequent monitoring of student progress, a safe and orderly environment, instructional leadership, and home/school partnerships (Starmont CSD).

### **Current Student Learning Goals**

Each year students are assessed throughout the school year for their learning through annual testing. FAST (Formative Reading Assessment System for Teachers) (Formative Reading Assessment System for Teachers) and ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress) are administered at Starmont School District. FAST is administered three times per school year in September, January, and April to assess student knowledge in reading and math and is administered to students in grades PreK-12. In grades 6-12, students meet with their advisory teacher and use the testing benchmarks and their data from the last testing window to set a suitable goal for the next testing period. Students then reference their goal after they have taken their test. Students also complete MySAEBERS (my Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener) for grades JK-12 to evaluate their current social, academic, and emotional health. The data from the MySAEBERS test is analyzed by the district's Learning Support Team and proper action is taken for students who were flagged as below proficient.

### **School Mentoring Characteristics**

Starmont Community School District provides first-year teachers, second-year teachers, and new teachers to the district with a mentor and support from an instructional coach. New teachers to the profession are provided with a mentor for two years and new teachers to the district are provided with a mentor for one year. Mentors are chosen by administration and mentees receive a mentor who is in the same building and/or in the same content area. The district's mentoring coordinator oversees the mentoring program and guides mentors and mentees.

Mentors and mentees engage in a one-day professional development in-service before the new school year begins. Mentors are given specific instructions on expectations of them as mentors, and these expectations are also outlined in the school handbook and contract offered to mentors. Mentees are also given an outline of their expectations as mentoring program members. Mentors and mentees are needed to engage in 18 hours of contact with one another. Mentors and mentees log their interactions with each other in a Google document and outline what was discussed, and action steps for the next meeting. Most partnerships break this into 9 hours during each semester and typically meet once a week.

Mentors and mentees take part in monthly meetings that are 30-45 minutes. These meetings focus on topics that mentors and mentees have expressed interest in learning more about. Mentors and mentees also see one another once during each semester. A reflection form is completed over the observation and highlights are shared at a mentor/mentee monthly meeting. Each partnership also receives a monthly calendar with points of conversation topics for mentor/mentee weekly meetings.

First-year and second-year teachers also spend time working through the Iowa Teaching Standards with their mentors. The eight standards are outlined in a document shared with mentees, and artifacts are gathered to show evidence of mastery of the standard. This collection of artifacts becomes the mentee's digital portfolio which is then evaluated by administration before approving a new teacher's submission for their standard teaching license in Iowa. The mentor coordinator oversees this work, and the mentor is expected to support the mentee during this process.

### **Teacher Instructional Practices, Assessment Practices, and Professional Development**

Teachers at Starmont Community School District have all been trained in KAGAN Cooperative Learning Strategies, and full implementation began during the 2019-2020 school year. New staff that enter the district receive training from their mentor. According to KAGAN (2024), the KAGAN structures increase academic achievement, enhance self-esteem, create a more harmonious classroom climate, reduce discipline problems, and develop students' social skills and character virtues. A primary focus has been on implementing structures with fidelity that increase student engagement, promote classroom management, and strengthen teaching strategies. All teachers in the district take part in learning labs two times a year. Teachers are given a list of host teachers who record a lesson and the topic of focus. Teachers select a topic, watch the video recording, and complete a reflection sheet. Then all the teachers who watched the same video meet with the host and a TLC coach who is the moderator. Time is spent sharing what was seen, asking inquiry questions, and stating what strategies each teacher will carry into their classroom.

Each year teachers complete an Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP). Each teacher creates a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goal. An action plan sheet is completed by each teacher and data is inserted into the action plan sheet during the school year as components of the SMART goal are met. All staff completing an IPDP attend quarterly meetings to discuss goal progress with peers. At the end of the school year, each staff member meets with their building administrator to discuss goal results and steps moving forward.

Teachers attend professional development every other Wednesday afternoon. A focus has been placed on math and literacy, with mental health training integrated within those sessions. Staff also spend time within departments analyzing student data, reviewing curriculum maps,

preparing quarterly report cards, and preparing for parent-teacher conferences. Elementary staff (K-5) are also continuing the process of refining standards-based report cards that were rolled out in the 1st quarter of the 2023-2024 school year. Middle school (6-8) are continuing with the work of strengthening response to intervention (RTI) and high school (9-12) are continuing the peer review process. Professional development has been shifting and has a stronger focus on what teachers have expressed as needs.

### **Needs Assessment**

Starmont Community School District has experienced a large turnover rate of teachers in the past five years. The turnover rate has started to decline, but a strong mentoring program needs to be established and maintained to ensure the teacher turnover rate remains low. The first step to establishing a strong mentoring program is the support of the administration. According to Frahm and Cianca (2021), administrative support has consistently been recognized as a critical component in retaining effective educators and principals are significant because of their responsibilities involved with creating schedules, providing resources, facilitating collaborative interactions, and establishing community partnerships. Starmont has experienced changes with all three administrators, superintendent, middle/high school principal, and elementary principal, over the past five years, and each administrator enters the position with their ideas on what is effective for mentoring. The first step to establishing a strong mentoring program at Starmont is consistent guidelines for the administration to follow when collaborating with new staff.

New teachers to the profession and a school district often struggle at the beginning of the year with new expectations, building relationships, curriculum, establishing classrooms, and learning about the district. To address all these challenges, preservice days for new staff need to be put in place. Starmont currently has new staff and their mentors come in for one day of new

staff orientation before the new school year begins. On this day new staff meet with their mentor, receive a binder filled with information about Starmont, and spend time exploring the binder, learning from a speaker from Keystone AEA to discover the services that are available to staff members, technology resources, meeting with administrators, responsibilities, district expectations, exploring handbooks, district forms, and learn about the requirements of the mentoring program. One day is not enough time to orient new staff to a district. It has been proposed to make the learning two days to allow new staff time to digest information, have more work time with mentors, and spend more time on curriculum, a need identified by mentees. Mentees and mentors also need time to develop their relationship, and two days of working together would begin this foundation.

The mentor and mentee relationship are a critical component of a strong mentoring program. A mentor for a teacher new to Starmont is chosen by the administrator. There is no formal application process for those interested in mentoring and there is not a mentor pairing process in place. Relationships are important and new teachers depend on that continuity, and a pairing process should take place and take into consideration the pairing preferences of both the new teacher and mentor (Wold et al., 2023). According to the research, Wold et al. (2023) have determined the importance of supportive mentoring relationships for both new teachers and mentors leads to a higher teacher retention rate. Starmont needs to develop a mentor pairing process to ensure that new teachers to the district feel supported and are paired with a mentor whom they will be able to build a positive, supportive relationship with.

Mentors do not receive adequate training on mentoring practices, and clear goals for the mentoring program are not in place. Callahan (2016) states that a mentoring program is only as strong as its mentors, strong professional development for mentors is essential, and teacher-



mentoring programs must provide clear and concise goals for mentors. Starmont gives mentors a brief list of expectations, meets with them for a brief time on one of the pre-service days for new teachers, and tells mentors to log their time with their mentees in a Google form. Mentors and mentees participate in group monthly meetings and a checklist is given to mentors and mentees at the beginning of each month with topics to discuss, but mentors are not trained in leadership practices or taught what practices make a strong mentor. The program lacks accountability and support for mentors.

A mentoring program that provides consistent support to mentors and mentees is needed to ensure both groups of people feel supported and have the tools needed to be successful in their roles. New teachers have many demands on them in their first year in a district, and they need the assurance that their mentor is prepared to support them and guide them through their first year. The current induction program does not provide enough time for mentors and mentees to build relationships and address beginning-of-the-year material and needs in an appropriate amount of time. Mentor and mentee relationships need more time and guidance to develop a positive, trusting foundation, and mentors need to be better trained and supported for their role.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **School Data and Analysis**

At the end of the 2023-2024 school year data was collected in late March from all the mentees at Starmont Community School District. The nine mentees were K-12 teachers with three first-year teachers, two second-year teachers, and four teachers new to the district with four years and ten years of experience. The Google Form survey was about mentees' relationship with their mentor and their experience with the mentoring program.

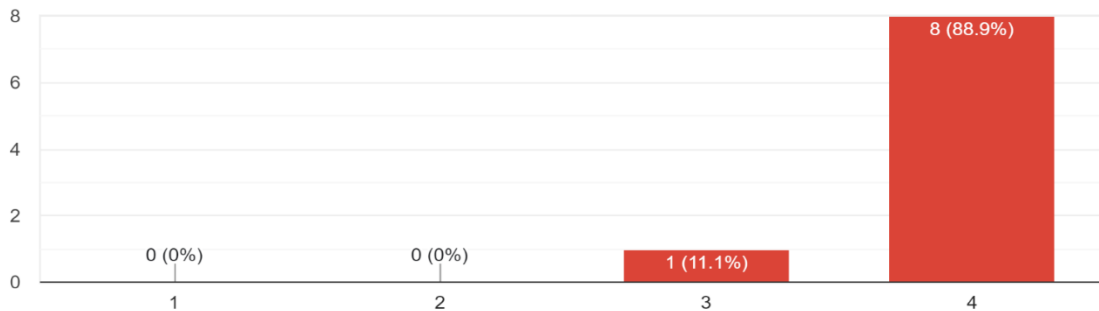
The first section of the Google Form survey asked mentees if they felt supported by the mentoring program and if the overall program provided them with the tools needed to grow as an educator. Mentees reported on the mentoring program’s quality and the program's ability to support their continuous improvement and growth as an educator (see Figure 1). 88.9% of the mentees strongly agree that the program supported their growth and improvement as an educator, and 11.1% agree that the program supported them.

**Figure 1**

*The mentoring and induction program has promoted my continuous improvement and growth as an educator.*

The Mentoring and Induction Program has promoted my continuous improvement and growth as an educator.

9 responses

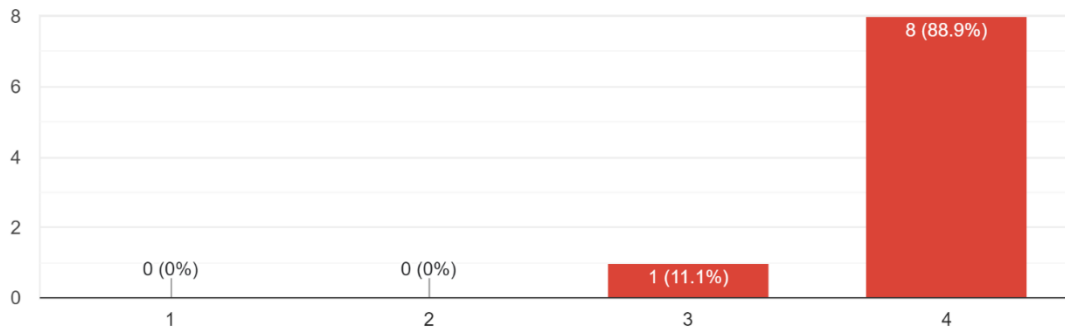


Mentees were asked if the program provided them with the support, direction, and training necessary for them to promote excellence in teaching as described by the Iowa Teaching Standards (see Figure 2). Eight mentees, 88.9% strongly agreed and one mentee, 11.1% agreed that the mentoring program offered the support needed from the Iowa Teaching Standards.

**Figure 2**

*Supporting growth as an educator*

The Mentoring and Induction Program provided me with the supports, direction, and training necessary for me to promote excellence in teaching as described by the Iowa Teaching Standards.  
9 responses

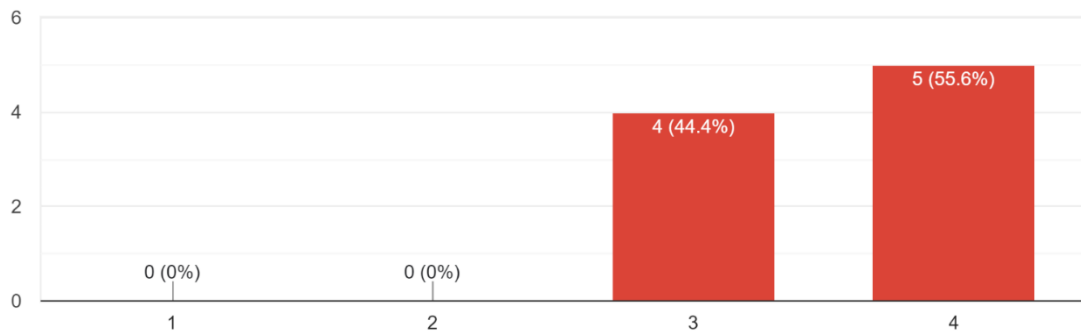


Respondents stated the culture and atmosphere of the mentoring program was positive (see Figure 3). 55.6% of the mentees strongly agreed the culture and atmosphere of the program was strong, and 44.4% of the mentees agreed the culture and atmosphere was positive.

**Figure 3**

*Culture and atmosphere*

How would you rate the culture and atmosphere surrounding the mentoring and induction program?  
9 responses



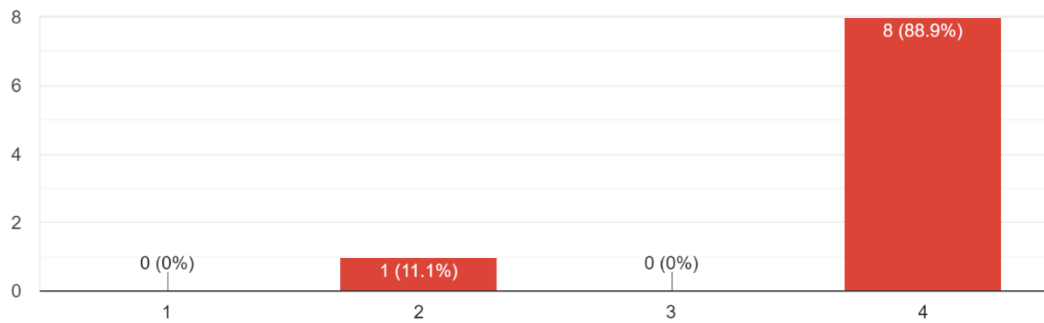
The support the mentoring program gave to mentees as they transitioned into the district (see Figure 4), 88.9% strongly agreed the support allowed them to transition into the district, and 11.1% disagreed the support allowed them to transition into the district.

**Figure 4**

*Transition support into district*

The Mentoring and Induction Program gave me the supports necessary to transition smoothly to the district.

9 responses

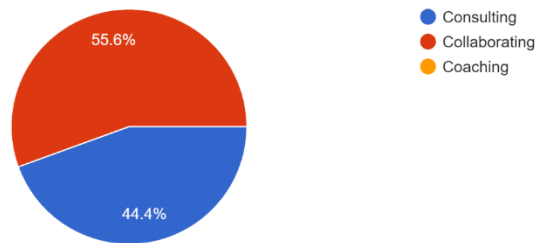


The second section of the Google Form survey focused on mentee’s relationship with their mentor, types of interactions, and topics discussed during conversations. The types of interactions between the mentor and mentee were consulting, collaborating, and coaching, (see Figure 5) 55.6% of mentees stated the typical interaction was collaborating and 44.4% stated their main interaction was collaborating.

**Figure 5**

*Mentor and mentee interactions*

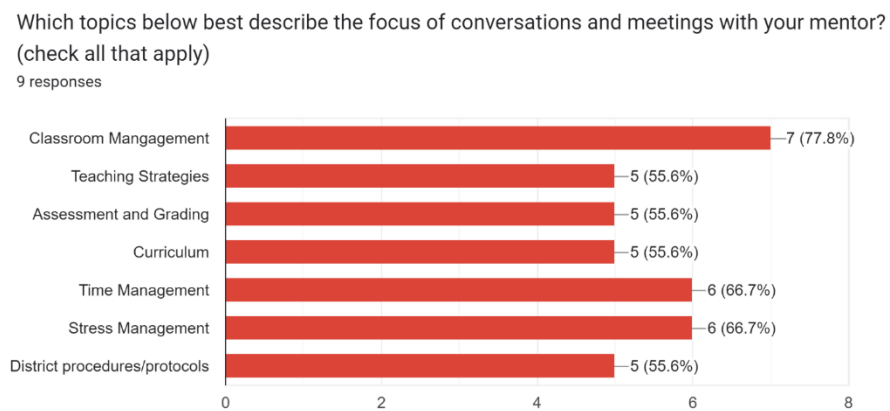
Which description below best describes the typical interaction between you and your mentor?  
 9 responses



In Figure 6, mentees were asked to check all the topics listed that were focused on conversation between their mentor and them: classroom management, teaching strategies, assessment and grading, curriculum, time management, stress management, and district procedures and protocols. The results indicated that most topics were discussed equally, with classroom management being the most frequently discussed.

**Figure 6**

*Focus of conversations between mentor and mentee*

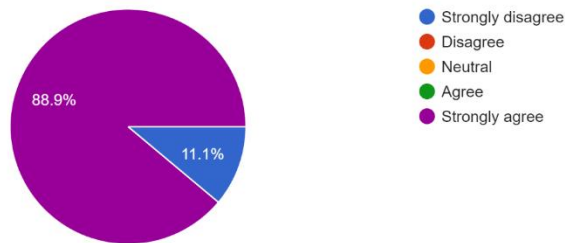


The relationship between the mentor and the mentee was the focus of Figure 7, Figure 8, and Figure 9. Figure 7 addressed the foundation of the relationship with a focus on mutual respect, trust, and confidentiality. 88.9% of mentees state they have a positive relationship with their mentor and 11.1% of mentees strongly disagree that their relationship with their mentor is positive.

**Figure 7**

*Relationship with mentor*

My mentor and I have a relationship built on mutual respect, trust, and confidentiality.  
9 responses



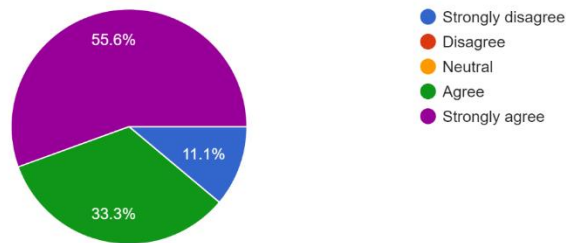
In Figure 8, 55.6% of mentees stated that they strongly agree that their mentor communicated effectively and regularly with them. 33.3% of mentees agree that their mentor communicated effectively and regularly with them and 11.1% of mentees strongly disagree that their mentor communicated with them effectively and regularly.



**Figure 8**

*Effective Communication*

My mentor communicates effectively and regularly with me.  
9 responses

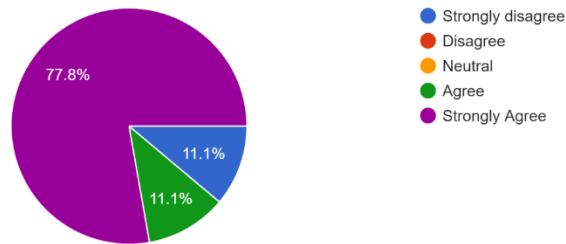


Finally, in Figure 9 mentees reported on their mentor's ability to demonstrate skills and knowledge that supported the mentee and helped them grow as a professional. 77.8% strongly agreed that their mentor was supportive of them, 11.1% of mentees agreed that their mentor had the ability to support them, and 11.1% of mentees strongly disagreed that their mentor was supportive of them as a professional.

**Figure 9**

*Mentor demonstrates skills to support mentee*

My mentor demonstrates skills and knowledge that support me and help me grow as a professional in my position.  
9 responses



Mentees also responded to an open-ended question on the survey that asked what aspects of the mentoring and induction program could be improved to better meet their needs. Mentees all agreed that they wanted to see more support from administration and instructional coaches. Mentees also said they want more time at the start of the year to work with grade-level co-workers. One area for improvement that mentees stated was mentors receiving professional development on topics that mentees identified as needing support, so they were better prepared to support their mentee. All mentees said they felt their mentor was available when needed and appreciated someone they could go to with questions. Mentees also agreed that monthly group mentee and mentor meetings were beneficial and provided valuable information that could be applied to their classroom.

**Program Challenges**

From the data collected, strengths and weaknesses were analyzed. Starmont CSD mentees indicated weaknesses with the mentoring program. Communication was indicated as a weakness by one mentee (see Figure 8). In Figure 8, 11.1% of mentees stated communication was a weakness for their mentor. One mentee also indicated that they did not build a relationship of respect and confidentiality with their mentor (see Figure 7). The lack of communication with a mentor and the feeling that a relationship was not built on respect and confidentiality indicate a

weakness in the mentoring program. Figure 9 shows that one mentee did not feel their mentor had the skills needed to support them and one mentee agreed that their mentor had the skills needed to support them professionally but did not strongly agree. This shows a lack of professional development for mentors with a need to focus on communication, building a relationship with a mentee, and providing mentors with information on how to support their mentee professionally.

### **Program Strengths**

A strength of the mentoring program at Starmont CSD stated by mentees is the program's ability to help mentees transition into the district (see Figure 1). Mentees felt the mentoring program provided them with the support, direction, and training necessary to understand the Iowa Teaching Standards and apply them to their teaching (see Figure 2). The overall culture and atmosphere of the mentoring program was rated by mentees as strong (see Figure 3). The strengths indicated in figures one, two, and three demonstrate the overall culture of the mentoring program is positive, and mentees are satisfied with the program. Mentees and mentors need to address several topics during the school year and data collected in Figure 6 shows that topics of classroom management, teaching strategies, assessment and grading, curriculum, time management, stress management, and district procedures and protocols were covered. This data shows that mentors and mentees are having conversations about the big topics that need to be addressed during a school year.

### **Assessment Needs and Analysis**

Through this data collection and analysis, first- and second-year mentees were surveyed about their mentoring experience and mentoring relationships at Starmont CSD. Mentees rated the mentoring program on how it promoted continuous growth for them as educators, how well

the program promoted excellence in teaching as described by the Iowa Teaching Standards, and if the program provided them with the mentor support needed to transition smoothly into the district. All mentees strongly agreed that the program offered these things to them, except one mentee disagreed that it offered the support necessary for a smooth transition into the district. This information indicates the overall mentoring program at Starmont CSD is positive and supports mentees in the district.

The data did point out weaknesses in Starmont CSD mentoring program. There was a mentee who did not have a relationship with their mentor built on respect and confidentiality, and a mentee who did not communicate effectively with their mentor. Three mentees agreed that they communicated effectively with their mentor but did not strongly agree. This information demonstrates the need for professional development for mentors prior to and during the school year on building relationships and maintaining a strong relationship. Communication is a critical component of mentoring, and mentors need training on communication and why it is important to their relationship with their mentee. There is a need for consistent training among all mentors and accountability for mentors so that all mentees have a positive experience in the Starmont CSD mentoring program.

For this school improvement plan, future research could assess the mentor's perspective of the program since data collection only focused on the mentee's perspective of the program. Mentors and mentees could also have separate group meetings to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program and offer solutions for improving the program. Data collection from administration on the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring program would provide a distinct perspective of the program.

## Action Plan

### Strategies

Multiple themes were identified after reviewing literature that supports the plan for an improved mentoring program at Starmont CSD. These themes identified included professional development for mentors, mentor and mentee relationships, effective mentoring practices, administrative support, and program structure. New teachers to the profession and new teachers to the district should receive support from various people in the district. New staff need to be supported by administration, leaders in the district, colleagues, and their mentor. In Kutsyuruba's research (2020) how administrators engage with new staff and mentors affects the structure of the mentoring program. Mentees identified administrators need to support the mentoring program through supporting mentor and mentee collaboration with resources, support mentee instructional practices, provide professional development to support mentors, and provide school-based activities that discuss school initiatives and evaluation procedures (Kutsyuruba, 2020).

Providing mentors with professional development to develop their skills as mentors is essential to a strong mentoring program. According to Aspfors and Fransson (2015) mentors and new teachers need to have a relationship built on trust, support, and respect for each other. Building this relationship must begin on the first day of interaction between a mentee and mentor. Mentors stated that proper training helped them be successful as a mentor in research conducted by Reitman and Dunnick Karge (2019). Professional development for mentors helped develop the mentor/mentee relationship and mentees and mentors both stated a positive relationship helped them develop as educators (Reitman and Dunnick Karge, 2019). Establishing a strong, collaborative mentor and mentee relationship is critical to a mentee's success in a new district.

Research has found that mentors need to reflect on their relationship with the new teacher to be a quality mentor (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015). Mentors begin the mentoring process by building a relationship with the mentee at the beginning of the school year. This relationship building sets the stage for growing a positive relationship with the mentee. According to Lozinak (2016), positive mentoring relationships significantly impact teacher practice and student learning. The impact of a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee extends beyond the relationship to the classroom and interactions with colleagues and administration.

Critical components of the mentor and mentee relationship are effective mentoring practices. Research conducted by Polikoff et al. (2015) found that mentees want mentors who are familiar with the curriculum, located in the same school to offer maximum interactions and support, and their mentor has knowledge in the areas of pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and ability to mentor adults. Mentees went on to state that the type of interactions with their mentor were important mentoring practices (Polikoff et al., 2015). Mentees identified and research supports those interactions with an active learning component that have the most impact, and a close second being interactions that included the mentee receiving feedback from the mentor (Polikoff et al., 2015). Mentees believe these effective practices are imperative to a positive outcome with their mentor.

Lastly, the mentoring program's structure impacts mentees and mentors and the retention of new teachers in the Starmont CSD. Research conducted by Frahm and Cianca (2021) found that relationships between principals and staff affected retention rates. The mentoring program at Starmont CSD should provide a structure that promotes interactions with administrators during the day and beyond the classroom in professional development for mentors and mentees. New educators want positive feedback, space to make mistakes and be supported, and

acknowledgments from mentors according to Frahm and Cianca (2021). The program needs to offer guidelines for mentors and mentees when meeting and support the several types of interactions that mentors and mentees will have with one another. An evaluation of the mentoring program and implementation of effective mentoring practices will lead to a successful program that can be sustainable and support mentors and mentees.

### **Steps to Solve the Problem**

The following steps describe the improved mentoring program at Starmont CSD. First, the mentoring program must be approved by the administration in May of 2024. Teachers who will serve as mentors for the 2024-2025 school year will be selected by the administration and the mentor coordinator after applying for the role of mentor. A Google form survey will be completed by veteran teachers interested in mentoring. The Google form survey will contain the questions displayed in Figure 10. These forms will be evaluated, and mentors will be paired with a mentee in the same building and similar or same content area.

### **Figure 10**

#### *Mentor application*

1. Years of experience as a teacher.
2. Have you held any leadership roles in your previous or current district? List them below.
3. What qualities do you possess that will make you a strong mentor?
4. What times of the day will you be available to work with a mentee?
5. How will you help and support a new staff member at Starmont?
  - Once mentors are assigned to new teachers to the district, the mentor will be introduced to their mentee, and time will be given to allow both to talk and begin the relationship

building process. The goal is for new teachers to the district to be connected with a mentor within two weeks of hiring.

- Mentors will attend a ½ day professional development session prior to the school year that will be led by the mentor coordinator and instructional coaches. Each mentor will receive a calendar with continuing professional development sessions offered during the school year. This will be once a month for thirty minutes at the end of the school day. Topics that mentors will receive professional development prior to and during the school year include:
  - a. Building relationships
  - b. Effective mentoring practices
  - c. Fierce Conversations (the book Fierce conversations: Achieving success at work & in life, one conversation at a time by Susan Scott will be provided to each mentor and referenced during the year.
  - d. Classroom management
  - e. Book study Mentoring matters: A practical guide to learning-focused relationships by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman
- Mentor and mentees will attend a ½ day and full day orientation at the beginning of the school year. See Figure 11 for the full day agenda. The ½ day will be spent looking at curriculum (with curriculum resources available), continuing work on checklist, and working in rooms.
- Before the school year starts, mentees and mentors will set up a schedule of when they will meet each week during the school year (administration allows these meetings to occur during the school day if time allows). Conversations will be guided by a monthly



checklist given to mentors and mentees on the first school day of the month (see Figure 12).

- During the school year, mentors and mentees will work on the mentees electronic evaluation document provided by administrators outlining the eight Iowa Teaching Standards. The administration expects new teachers to the district to provide artifacts demonstrating evidence of meeting each teaching standard. A document provided by Keystone AEA (2024) (see Figure 13) will support and guide this work each month.
- Mentor observations: The mentor will observe the mentee once each quarter, filling out a pre and post observation form. Time will be spent following the observation to reflect on the observation.
- Mentor observations: The mentor will observe the mentee once each quarter, filling out a pre and post observation form. Time will be spent following the observation to reflect on the observation.
- Mentors and mentees will complete a mid-year survey and an end of year survey evaluating the mentoring program.

## **Figure 11**

*New teacher orientation agenda*

8:00-9:00

- Welcome and Introduction
- Colors Quiz (what color are you)
- How can understanding your color help with relationship building?
- Keystone AEASupport and Services
- [Iowa Educator Ethics](#)
- Reflection over Sessions

9:00-10:00

- Instructional Coach Introductions
- Overview of District Initiatives
  - a. [PBIS](#)
  - a. [15 Day Challenges](#)
- IEP/504 Plans at a Glance
  - b. Modifications
  - c. Accommodations
  - d. Paraeducator Role
- Reflection

10:00-10:45

- 10:00 IPERS Presentation (5-15 minutes)
- Introductions of administrative team
- Evaluation process with administrators

10:45-12:00

- Remainder Time: Checklist work with Mentor/Mentee

12:00-12:30 Lunch

12:30-2:30

- FAST, Panorama, and Data–log in on computers
- PowerSchool
- Mentor Binder Information
- Mentor Work time on Checklist

2:35 Dessert Bar and Wrap Up

**Figure 12**  
*Monthly Calendar Checklist*

<p>August</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>AUGUST</b></p> <p><b><u>Mentor/Mentee Together</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce to staff in the building (nurse, counselor, special ed staff, secretaries, custodians/maintenance staff, cooks, paraeducators, AEA staff, specialist teachers, library staff, office staff)</li> <li>• Exchange cell phone information</li> <li>• Take a tour of the building/area</li> <li>• Show location of teacher’s lounge, refrigerators, staff restrooms, and kitchenette</li> <li>• Show location of work areas, copy machine, supplies in the work area, etc.</li> <li>• Show location of mailbox and reminder to get mail below name</li> <li>• Share checkout procedures for books, materials. Include Keystone materials in the discussion. (Mrs. Norberg will have new staff AEA numbers)</li> <li>• Review district calendar</li> <li>• Review potential duties and responsibilities (Bus Duty, Recess Duty, Lunchroom First Week of School, etc.)</li> <li>• Review committee assignments and show where to find these assignments</li> <li>• Review teacher dress code (jean days, dress up days, etc.)</li> <li>• Show where to find building schedules in the drive (Early Out, Late Start, etc.)</li> <li>• Explain weather notifications and make sure mentee is signed up to receive notifications</li> <li>• Discuss relationship with paraeducators and how to set up expectations for the year (paraeducator job description is in the black binder)</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss Blood Borne Pathogens, Right to Know, Mandatory Reporting, Suicide Training</li> <li>• Emergency response items: fire, tornado, intruder/active shooter, lockdown, the white bucket)</li> <li>• Discuss open house night</li> <li>• Share your lesson plan template and help mentee organize a lesson plan system</li> <li>• Share ideas for being organized the first week of school</li> <li>• Share upcoming testing dates (FAST, etc.)</li> <li>• Share building level communications</li> <li>• Explain procedures/expectations for students (attendance, tardies, lunch count, notes brought from home, etc.)</li> <li>• Explain procedures/expectations for staff (leaving the building, leaving early, calling in sick, etc.)</li> <li>• Explain Contract Hours</li> <li>• Explain parking (reserving parking spots)</li> <li>• Discuss playground rules/duties</li> <li>• Discuss where students can get needed items (school supplies, shoes for gym, outdoor gear, clothes)</li> <li>• Share building forms and where to locate forms for (transportation requests, PO requests, etc.</li> <li>• Discuss issues with maintenance, technology, janitorial to send an email to the appropriate person (Nick, Missy, or Jerry)</li> <li>• Ensure mentee is set up in power school and explain to contact Janet or Jerry with PowerSchool issues</li> <li>• Review homework policy and make up policy (vary by grade level)</li> <li>• Discuss PBIS--Give overview and expectations</li> <li>• Discuss KAGAN and give an overview and 1-2 strategies Discuss contacting grade level special education teachers to review IEP (Individualized Education Program) plans and 504 plans for individual students</li> <li>• Review if mentee has met with building principal to discuss the teacher evaluation process and expectations</li> <li>• Discuss self-care and life/work balance--Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Support, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in September</b></li> </ul>
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<p>September</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SEPTEMBER</b></p> <p><b><u>Mentor/Mentee Together</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share how teaching is going</li> <li>• Celebrations</li> <li>• Discuss any upcoming observations by administrator if any are scheduled</li> <li>• Discuss or assist in developing Individual Professional Development Plans (if mentee is new to profession, share what yours looks like)</li> <li>• Discuss how to write lesson plans</li> <li>• Re address any building/district wide assessments (FAST, diagnostic testing folders, etc.)</li> <li>• Discuss concerns about specific students who may be struggling and behavior difficulties. Discuss strategies to address concerns.</li> <li>• Share grading procedures (power school entering grades)</li> <li>• Discuss Fundraising Rules/Expectations (if there is a fundraiser this year)</li> <li>• Review intervention procedures and expectations</li> <li>• Check in on 15-day challenges</li> <li>• Clarify or discuss any points from recent faculty/team/grade level meetings</li> <li>• Check to make sure all mandatory trainings are done</li> <li>• Review how to ask for time off or report an absence</li> <li>• Discuss how to meet special education accommodations needed for specific students.</li> <li>• Discuss LST referral process</li> <li>• PBIS-Discuss implementation (majors, minors, tickets)</li> <li>• Share 1-2 KAGAN strategies to try this month in the classroom</li> <li>• Check how relationships with co-workers are going (celebrations, concerns)</li> <li>• Discuss self-care and life/work balance--Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Support, etc.</li> <li>• Homecoming Week (procedures, dress up days, participation, pep rally, etc.)</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in October</b></li> </ul>
<p>October</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OCTOBER</b></p> <p><b><u>Mentor/Mentee Together</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share how teaching is going</li> <li>• Celebrations</li> <li>• Discuss any upcoming observations by administrator if any are scheduled</li> <li>• Re address any building/district wide assessments (FAST, diagnostic testing folders, etc.)</li> <li>• Discuss concerns about specific students who may be struggling and behavior difficulties. Discuss strategies to address concerns. Reminder of LST form and team</li> <li>• Review intervention procedures and expectations</li> <li>• Review how to put behavior forms (minors/majors) into PowerSchool</li> <li>• Check in on 15-day challenges</li> <li>• Check in on how you are both doing on peer observations (elementary and secondary)</li> <li>• Be thinking about observations of each other and setting a date for observations (do not forget to ask for coverage at least 3-5 days in advance)</li> <li>• End of quarter expectations</li> <li>• Report Cards</li> <li>• Parent/Teacher Conference expectations (dates, times, topics of discussion, format, etc.)</li> <li>• Clarify or discuss any points from recent faculty/team/grade level meetings</li> <li>• Review PBIS expectations</li> <li>• Check how relationships with co-workers are going (celebrations, concerns)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss self-care and life/work balance--Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Support, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in October</b></li> </ul>
<p>November</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOVEMBER</b></p> <p><b><u>Mentor/Mentee Together</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share how teaching is going</li> <li>• Celebrations</li> <li>• Discuss any upcoming observations by administrator if any are scheduled</li> <li>• Make sure observations of each other are scheduled in November or December--Must be completed by December 10th</li> <li>• Readdress any building/district wide assessments (FAST, diagnostic testing folders, etc.)</li> <li>• Discuss concerns about specific students who may be struggling and behavior difficulties. Discuss strategies to address concerns. Reminder of LST form and team.</li> <li>• Review how interventions are going</li> <li>• Review how to put behavior forms (minors/majors) into PowerSchool</li> <li>• Check in on 15-day challenges</li> <li>• Lesson plans--check in to make sure lesson plans contain enough information (standard, plan for the subject, materials needed, etc.)</li> <li>• Sub plans--sickness is here, check in if you have plans available to a sub if you are gone (a sub binder with emergency plans)</li> <li>• Clarify or discuss any points from recent faculty/team/grade level meetings</li> <li>• Review PBIS expectations</li> <li>• Stay afloat during the holiday season at school</li> <li>• Discuss self-care and life/work balance--Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Support, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in December</b></li> </ul>

<p>December</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>DECEMBER</b></p> <p><b><u>Mentor/Mentee Together</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share how teaching is going</li> <li>• Celebrations</li> <li>• Discuss any upcoming observations by administrator if any are scheduled</li> <li>• Make sure observations of each other are completed</li> <li>• Discuss concerns about specific students who may be struggling and behavior difficulties. Discuss strategies to address concerns. Reminder of LST form and team.</li> <li>• Lesson plans--check in to make sure lesson plans contain enough information (standard, plan for the subject, materials needed, etc.)</li> <li>• Sub plans--sickness is here, check in if you have plans available to a sub if you are gone (a sub binder with emergency plans)</li> <li>• Participate in school events for the holiday</li> <li>• Have fun and look forward to break!!</li> <li>• During break, take a break, relax, and enjoy some time off</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in January</b></li> </ul>
<p>January</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>JANUARY</u></b></p> <p><b><u>MENTOR/MENTEE MEETING TOPICS</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set goals for 3rd quarter</li> <li>• Review any building/district level testing that will take place second semester FAST testing, Iowa Assessments will be discussed in February--taking in April)</li> <li>• Discuss home communications &amp; ideas to strengthen home-school connections (e-mail, newsletter, tips to parents, blog etc.)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss communicating with parents (positive communication and concerns)</li> <li>• Discuss any second semester changes to schedule and/or duties and responsibilities. (updates Bus Duty list elementary)</li> <li>• PBIS - Together we set specific goals to implement PBIS more fully.</li> <li>• Review classroom management techniques</li> <li>• Review late start/early out schedules</li> <li>• Any concerns that need to be addressed</li> <li>• Discuss Self Care and Life/Work Balance - Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Supports, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in February</b></li> </ul>
<p>February</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>February</u></b></p> <p><b><u>MENTOR/MENTEE</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share and bring each other up to date with what has been happening in your classrooms.</li> <li>• Review mentees portfolio—elementary portfolios are due at the end of March</li> <li>• Discuss upcoming observations and formal observations, walk-throughs, etc.</li> <li>• PBIS - How are you doing with positive postcards? If you have missed doing them, a saying someone always said to me was try to do better, if you did not send any last month, do at least 1 this month.</li> <li>• Review how KAGAN has been developing in each person's classroom this year</li> <li>• Personal days—you can only roll over 2 and have a total of 5 in one year, be looking into using those if you need to. Remember we cannot use them for the last 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) of the school year.</li> <li>• Upcoming events as we roll into spring—elementary if it is grade level such as a field trip email Heath to put on master calendar</li> <li>• Any concerns that need to be addressed</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss Self Care and Life/Work Balance - Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Supports, etc.</li> <li>• Write a note of support/thanks to a staff member during the month of February</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in March</b></li> </ul>
<p>March</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>March</u></b></p> <p><b><u>MENTOR/MENTEE</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share and bring each other up to date with what has been happening in your classrooms.</li> <li>• How are your portfolios coming?</li> <li>• Discuss upcoming observations and formal observations, walk-throughs, etc.</li> <li>• Personal days—you can only roll over 2 and have a total of 5 in one year, be looking into using those if you need to. Remember we cannot use them for the last 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) of the school year.</li> <li>• Check out spring events: PBIS, field trips, field day</li> <li>• ISASP testing—pay attention to email regarding this</li> <li>• Any concerns that need to be addressed</li> <li>• Discuss Self Care and Life/Work Balance - Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Supports, etc.</li> <li>• Secretly thank a staff member this month—a pop, candy, and attach a note</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in April</b></li> </ul>
<p>April</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>April Checklist</u></b></p> <p><b><u>MENTOR/MENTEE</u></b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share and bring each other up to date with what has been happening in your classrooms.</li> <li>• Discuss upcoming observations and formal observations, walk-throughs, etc.</li> <li>• PBIS - How are you doing with positive postcards? If you have missed doing them, a saying someone always said to me was try to do better, if you did not send any last month, do at least 1 this month.</li> <li>• Personal days—you can only roll over 2 and have a total of 5 in one year, be looking into using those if you need to. Remember we cannot use them for the last 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) of the school year.</li> <li>• Check out spring events: PBIS, field trips, field day</li> <li>• Begin thinking about the end of year (insurance forms, classroom needs, watch email closely, final observations, etc.)</li> <li>• ISASP testing—pay attention to email regarding this</li> <li>• Any concerns that need to be addressed</li> <li>• Discuss Self Care and Life/Work Balance - Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Supports, etc.</li> <li>• Secretly thank a staff member this month with a nice note</li> <li>• <b>Set up scheduled times to meet as mentor/mentee in May</b></li> </ul>
<p>May</p>	<p>The tasks suggested in these monthly checklists are based on issues that commonly arise during each month. Use this list as a reminder, and feel free to add any additional tasks that may be specific to your level or needs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>MAY</u></b></p> <p><b><u>MENTOR/MENTEE</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share and bring each other up to date with what has been happening in your classrooms.</li> <li>• Review end of year checklists</li> <li>• Discuss how to prepare room before leaving for the summer</li> <li>• End of year report cards</li> <li>• Attend final mentor/mentee meeting</li> <li>• Complete end of year survey</li> <li>• Discuss Self Care and Life/Work Balance - Sleep, Exercise, Relaxation, People Supports, etc.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write a note of support/thanks to a staff member during the month of May</li><li>• Enjoy your summer!</li></ul>
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**Figure 13**

*Iowa Teaching Standards Talking Points and Resources*

Month	Standard Focus	Discussion Questions	Evidence	Resources to Support this Standard
August	ITS 1,6,8	What classroom procedures, and routines have you created to start the year? How are you building your classroom culture?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Using Data</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Using Student Data</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">How Teachers Use Data to Improve Instruction</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AFAT Learning Online Ethics for Iowa's Educators</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Classroom Practices</a></li> </ul>
September	ITS 6,3	What do you notice about student behaviors in your classroom? What successes and challenges are you experiencing?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Classroom Routines Eliminate Confusion &amp; Chaos</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Keystone's Well Managed Classroom Micro-Credentials</a></li> </ul>
October	ITS 6,3	How are you organizing your lesson plans? What instructional materials are you using? What do you not have that you feel like you still need? What student engagement strategies are you using? How are students responding?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Strategies for Teachers: Preparation &amp; Planning</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Effective Lesson Planning</a></li> </ul>
November	ITS 5	What are you using for formative assessments in your class? How are assessments guiding your instruction? How are you using assessment data? How are you informing students and parents?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">How to Guide and Monitor Student Learning</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">4 Benefits of Monitoring Student Progress in the Classroom</a></li> </ul>
December	ITS 4	What instructional strategies are you using to teach your content standards? How can we capitalize on students prior knowledge and experiences to drive instruction? How are students responding? How are you including SEL practices in your classroom? What technology are you using to reinforce learning?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">5-E's Instructional Model</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Student Engagement Strategies</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Keystone's Digital Resources</a></li> </ul>

January	ITS 6,3	What classroom procedures and routines need to be revisited? What student engagement strategies are working in your classroom? What challenges & celebrations have you experienced with student engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Researched-Backed Instructional Strategies for Better Classroom Management</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">RealRap with Reynolds</a></li> </ul>
February	ITS 2	What professional learning have you engaged in to better understand your content standards? What work has your PLC engaged in to unpack standards? What assistance do you need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">4 Strategies to Build Content Knowledge</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Teacher Learning That Supports Student Learning: What Teachers Need to Know</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Evidence-Based Practices</a></li> </ul>
March	ITS 5	What student assessment data are you (and your PLC) analyzing to make instructional decisions? FAST? Classroom Data? ISASP? What methods do you use to provide student feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">6 Effective Ways to Monitor Student Progress in Classroom</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Strategies for Monitoring Progress</a></li> </ul>
April	ITS 1,4,6	What evidence & reflections have you collected to meet ITS 1,4,6?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Raise The Bar: Strategies to Improve Student Achievement</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">10 ways to meet the learning needs of all students</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Classroom Management Strategies Guide - 5 Foundational Techniques for Student Success</a></li> </ul>
May	ITS 1,7,8	What professional growth do you plan to pursue over the summer? What evidence & reflections have you collected to meet ITS 1,7,8?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">John Hattie on How to Advance Achievement</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Teacher Professional Growth</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AFALearningOnline Ethics for Iowa's Educators</a></li> </ul>

Iowa Teaching Standards

Standard 1	Student Achievement	Demonstrates ability to enhance academic performance and support for implementation of the School District student achievement goals.
Standard 2	Content Knowledge	Demonstrates competence in content knowledge appropriate to the teaching position
Standard 3	Planning and Preparation	Demonstrates competence in planning and preparing for instruction
Standard 4	Meeting the multiple learning needs of students	Uses strategies to deliver instruction that meet the multiple learning needs of students
Standard 5	Monitor learning	Uses of a variety of methods to monitor student learning
Standard 6	Classroom Management	Demonstrates competence in classroom management
Standard 7	Professional Growth	Engages in professional growth
Standard 8	Professional Responsibilities	Fulfills professional responsibilities established by the school district

## **Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

### **Implementation of the Plan**

#### **Timeline**

This plan has a projected start date for the upcoming 2024-2025 school year. The revised mentoring program plan will be presented to the administration team in May 2024, and once approved, the selection of mentors will begin before August 2024. Once mentors are approved, professional development will be provided for mentors ½ day prior to the beginning of the school year. All new staff and mentors will attend 1 ½ days of preservice training in August 2024 prior to the start of the 2024-2025 school year. Mentors and mentees will establish meeting dates at the beginning of each month, and log meetings in Google sheets to keep a continuous log. The mentor coordinator will oversee this document. Calendars will be distributed at the beginning of each month with a checklist for mentors and mentees to reference and work through during meeting times. Mentors and mentees will observe one another during each semester and complete an observation form and engage in a discussion with one another. The mentoring program will be evaluated by mentors and mentees through a mid-year and end of year Google form survey. Administration, instructional coaches, mentors, mentees, and Keystone AEA will all play a role in supporting and the success of the mentoring program.

#### **Staff Responsibilities**

##### ***Administrators***

Administrators will review the plan for the mentoring program for the 2024-2025 school year. The superintendent, high school/middle school principal, and elementary principal will meet and assign mentors to new teachers to the district at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. The administration team will also establish dates for mentors and new staff to return to campus in August. The administrative team will support new staff through observations, check-ins, and

supporting the mentor coordinator. Administration interactions with mentors and mentees are critical to the mentoring program and establishing a positive environment within the mentoring program.

### ***Instructional Coaches***

Instructional coaches will work directly with the mentoring coordinator to support the mentoring program. Coaches will connect with mentees during preservice days and begin to establish a supportive relationship. Instructional coaches will offer support to mentors when they are sought out to support the work mentors are engaging in with mentees. Coaches will also check in with mentors throughout the year. Instructional coaches and the mentor coordinator will plan and carry out the preservice days training and professional development for mentors and mentees. Coaches will also provide professional development to mentors throughout the school year when asked by the mentor coordinator. Coaches are an essential part of the success of the revised mentoring program.

### ***Mentor Coordinator***

The mentor coordinator ensures the success and implementation of the mentoring program. The coordinator works directly with administration, instructional coaches, mentors, mentees, and AEA during the school year. Organization of agendas, choosing mentors, providing professional development to mentors and mentees, keeping administration and instructional coaches informed, and ensuring all pieces of the program are being completed is the critical role of the mentor coordinator. The coordinator will send out a mid-year and end of year survey to mentors and mentees, evaluate the data, and share results with administration and stake holders regarding the mentoring program. The mentor coordinator is the driving force behind the mentoring program.



***Mentors***

Mentors will attend a ½ day of training in August 2024 to begin the new school year. Mentors will receive resources needed to begin the year with their mentee and receive information that will support the development of their relationship with their mentee. Mentors will then begin formally meeting with their mentee during the 1 ½ preservice days in August 2024 prior to the beginning of the school year. During the school year, mentors will establish meeting dates with their mentee, and meet regularly to discuss items on the monthly checklist. Mentors will assist the mentee with beginning of the year preparation work and be a reliable resource of information. Mentors will also provide professional feedback to their mentees after completing an observation. For accountability, mentors will log meeting times with mentees and a brief description of what was discussed in Google sheets. Mentors will also attend monthly meetings with the mentor coordinator and their mentee. Most importantly mentors will establish a positive relationship with their mentee and offer moral and emotional support.

***Mentees***

Mentees will return to school 1 ½ days in August prior to all staff reporting back. Mentees will participate in preservice training with their mentor, administrators, mentor coordinator, instructional coaches, and Keystone AEA staff. An agenda (see Figure 11, above) outlines the focus of the preservice days. Mentees will be active participants in the preservice days and participate in activities with their mentor. Mentees will work through the monthly checklist with their mentor and receive feedback with a positive attitude. Mentees need to work to establish a positive relationship with their mentor and fully engage with their mentor. Mentees will complete a mid-year and end of year Google Form survey which will evaluate the mentoring

program. Asking questions, seeking out their mentor when support is needed, and appreciating their mentor's knowledge and expertise are expectations of the mentees.

### ***AEA***

In previous years, Keystone AEA has provided support to the mentoring coordinator through monthly Zoom meetings during the school year. These Zoom meetings are a check-in for the mentoring coordinator to share ideas with AEA staff and receive support from an outside source. The AEA provides materials to the coordinator to share with mentors and mentees. Professional development materials are provided to mentors and mentees, and Keystone AEA staff will attend professional development if available. Keystone AEA is a valuable resource for the mentoring program.

### **Data Collection**

Mentors and mentees will complete a Google form survey two times a year to gather data on their experience and participation in Starmont CSD mentoring program. This survey will ask participants to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program. This data will be analyzed by administration, instructional coaches, and the mentor coordinator. Results of the survey will be shared with the school board, stakeholders, and Starmont employees. Once the results are analyzed, work can begin to improve the program for the next school year. Data will also be collected on mentor and mentees' interactions with one another during their meetings. This data will be evaluated to look for common themes among conversations and will be used to provide information to mentors and mentees during the next school year on important topics to mentees and mentors.

### **Barriers and Challenges**

An identified barrier that is always present is time. Mentees and mentors will work with the mentor coordinator and administration to find time for the mentoring program and to meet with one another consistently. Another challenge will be finding mentors in the same content area as the mentee. Starmont CSD is a small rural district and there may not be a mentor available in the same content area as the mentee. The school will need to find a way to support the new mentee and reach out to a mentor from a neighboring district to ensure the mentee is receiving the level of support needed. An added challenge rural schools are facing is the teacher shortage. Teachers are leaving the field and fewer teachers are entering the profession, which is resulting in a shortage. Starmont CSD has experienced a high rate of turnover with administration, and this affects the support the program is receiving from administration. One of the main factors keeping teachers in the profession was a moderate to strong connection with an administrator according to research (Ford et al., 2019). All administrative staff are returning for the 2024-2025 school year, and this will support development of strong relationships with staff in year one and year two of the mentoring program. A strong mentoring program will increase teacher retention and positively support the needs of mentors and mentees.

### **Conclusion**

A mentoring program will be successful with support from the administration, district leaders, instructional coaches, the mentor coordinator, dedicated mentors, and a solid plan for the mentoring program. Mentors will be successful in the program with professional development and resources that support their needs as mentors. According to Reitman and Dunnick Karge (2019) mentees stated the most helpful types of support were peer to peer relationships with colleagues and a supportive administrator. Mentees will have a successful year at Starmont CSD

with a positive and supportive relationship with their mentor, and through positive interactions with administration and colleagues.



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**Appendix**