

foreword for."An Administrator's Guide to Better Teacher Mentoring

Since the middle of the 1980s public attention has been drawn to the debate over the quality of America's schools. One repeatedly used indicator, common to every public, private, or parochial school in our nation, the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. An effective teacher, in the minds of many Americans, is one who enables students to learn, while simultaneously advancing individual students to the next tier of their achievement. Perceived as a collective, renewable resource, teachers continue to be upgraded through a deliberate and thoughtful practice defined as a professional development continuum , a guided sequential progression that begins with mentoring.

Research documents that teachers who know a lot about teaching and who work in environments that allow them to know students well, are the critical elements of successful student learning. The question plaguing school boards and administrators today is how to elevate beginning teachers to a satisfactory level of effectiveness while stabilizing attrition rates. One educative solution is offered by Bill Fibkins in this book, a process plan for total school involvement in an expanded and enriched set of experiences designed to nurture, support, instruct, and incorporate an entry-level teacher into the working life of a school and district. He does not suggest that mentoring is easy or a quick fix; however, he does reiterate that is worth doing.

The stated goals of the book are to give direction to the selection and preparation of mentors, design a mentoring curriculum, and monitor a school-based mentoring program. It is a practical step-by-step approach to establishing a program, a logical approach to a complicated process, one of many to be sustained and managed by a building or district administrator. Yet a mentoring process, such as the one described by Bill, is a program that will demonstrate annual gain as incentives for retirement become available and as pressure builds on local boards of education to reduce class size. While a greater need exists for novice teachers continues so does the need for an induction program , a complex set of tasks

comprehensive and instructional in nature. Mentoring as a school improvement initiative, which is Fibkins thrust, is based on the logic of mutual benefits among and between the major constituencies active in the public schools: teachers, administrators, parents and students, and unions. It is a process expected to benefit others in the school organization by improving the quality and ownership of decision making, reducing resistance to change, and ultimately, impacting student achievement.

Mentoring grows ever more important as alternate teacher certification programs expand and teachers, entering classrooms without without the benefit of supervised field experiences, are expected to perform at levels of competency.

Discouraged and disillusioned, many teachers quit, with half leaving the profession within five years. One purpose of mentoring, aside from offering support, encouragement, insight, and practice, is to retain new teachers within the educational system. The residual effects of teacher-mentoring programs most often are related to the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship, a relationship with an intense and specific life expectancy. During that designated time a mentor is expected to encourage the beginner to reflect upon the professional, social, and cultural issues of the school community.

School leaders and university deans continue to explore ways in which they can partner in the preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers. One such partnership could revolve around mentoring and supporting the beginning teacher, helping to dispel the professional loneliness that comes with the job while providing opportunities to expand their knowledge base of best practices for classroom success. Other partnership activities might include school-based teacher education programs, cohort placements of field experience students, and co-teaching campus courses by P-12 teachers.

During this decade, schools will hire two million new teachers. How well new teachers are selected, educated, and introduced into the schools may be the most important factors in the success or failure of public schools. Without well-educated and freshly motivated teachers, schools cannot succeed. New

teachers start their work charged with idealism, committed to making improvements, and may find their innovative ideas stifled by tradition-bound colleagues in the schools. Mentoring will not solve all the ills of the American education system; however it is one process that has made a difference in the life and work of new teachers. It is a process that makes a deliberate and sustained commitment to the education of educators.

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