

Mentorship Program
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Abstract

This research paper will discuss how mentorship programs have been used in schools and how a mentorship program could be implemented at Southern High School.

Mentorship Program

Introduction

“I wish I had someone to bounce ideas off at my campus.” “Do these shoes meet the requirements for the students’ dress code?” “What exactly happens during spirit week?” These are all comments that have come from multiple teachers in their first year of teaching at Southern High School. These teachers are not necessarily first year teachers, but instead are first year teachers at Southern High School. Whether these teachers are in their first year of teaching or just at a brand new campus many teachers feel like they are sinking or swimming, many of which are truly sinking. Some new teachers are able to find an unofficial mentor and stick with them their first years while others feel completely lost. The teachers who end up feeling completely lost will leave the teaching profession. Multiple school districts, across the country, have started to implement mentorship programs in order to support their new teachers in the hopes of retaining them. The implementation of a mentorship program will help retain school teachers which will have a positive impact on student learning as well as the climate and culture of the school. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary mentor is defined as “someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person” (Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, 2018). Contrary to this definition, a mentor does not have to be physically older, but one must be able to lead the protégé in the direction that fits the climate and culture of the school. “Mentor Programs are designed to offset beginning teaching as a disheartening “sink or swim” experience that serves neither new teachers nor their students” (Ganser, 2001). Implementing a mentorship program can really help new teachers not leave the profession prematurely

and even enjoy coming to work every day. According to Gregory Flynn, who is an education professor at Dowling College states, “half of all public school teachers leave teaching in the first five years” (Flynn, 2008). This number is outrageous, and has created the need to establish a way to keep teachers in the classroom. Creating a mentor program will take time, money, and a lot of planning, but in the end it will help teachers make a career out of teaching. “In humanistic mentoring, the mentor helped novices solve problems and feel less stressed about teaching” (Dangel, 2004). Mentors are needed to serve new teachers professionally and even personally if they are having concerns about their teaching ability.

Literature Review

Colorado New Educator Consortium

“In 2003, the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning reported that in 2000 more than one in five Colorado teachers left the schools in which they were teaching and one out of ten left teaching” (Dengel, 2004). This got the attention of leaders in Colorado and they decided that something must be done in order to keep their teachers from leaving the profession. It was found that this program was lacking in mentor training and even recruiting veteran teachers to agree to mentor a novice teacher. Colorado started asking retired teachers to come in to mentor new teachers. This was beneficial because the retired teachers had the time to observe and really spend one-on-one time with their assigned protégé since they did not have their own classes to worry about. Another problem Colorado ran into was that the mentors were showing their protégé “how things were done” their way instead of allowing the protégé use their own style for certain things. At the end of the year-long program “in general, mentored

younger teachers (ages 21-26) perceived general mentoring efforts to be more helpful than did older teachers (ages 32-65)” (Dangel, 2004). So it seems that the younger aged teachers were more receptive to the mentors, while the older aged teachers were not as receptive. This difference in receptiveness to the mentorship is cognoscente of how society has changed. In today’s society, younger individuals are open to making their life easier and run smoother, so they seek out information and ask questions to someone that has gained their respect and shows that they care. On the other hand an experienced teacher is set in their ways that have worked for years and not very receptive of advice from other teachers. This is not a positive thing because as educators one must be in the mindset that learning is a lifelong endeavor.

California Mentor Teacher Program

This case study is of the first year implementation of a mentorship program in California. “Legislation authorized the payment of a stipend of \$4000 per year per teacher for up to 5% of the teachers in a participating district. Another \$2000 per mentor per year was provided to districts to defray other costs of operations, which included freedom of movement by release time and substitute teachers, and access to special resources like training, materials and equipment; mentors were required to continue teaching students at least 60% of the time” (Shulman, 1986). In this study there were ten protégés used ranging from first year teachers to teachers in their first year at a new campus. This study gave multiple issues that arose during the course of the year-long mentorship program. One of the issues that the mentors had was that there was hostility from other teachers. The mentors reported hearing things like “She is a mentor. What can she do for me? What does she do anyway?” (Shulman, 1986). The mentors said

other teachers seemed to just making friendly banter, but still felt that it was inappropriate. This issue would need to be addressed by administration so that there would not be any further unnecessary comments. Mentors also reported that they had a hard time finding the balance between their own classes and spending adequate time with their protégé. Mentors would say “I can’t keep up the pace I’ve been going at. I have been trying to decide what I might reduce” (Shulman, 1986). As a teacher lack of time is always an issue. Administrators need to be cognizant of the fact that mentors will still have a full load of teaching classes in addition to their protégé. If at all possible administration should try to have the mentor and protégé have the same planning or even lunch period so they could potentially meet during that time. This would eliminate the need for the duo to meet outside of school time, although they would still likely meet outside of the school time. It would be even more convenient if the mentor teachers had a lesser class load in order to really be available to the new teacher. In this case they would be able to really devote time and energy into the mentorship relationship. Another issue was that the mentors did not feel that they had adequate substitute teachers covering their classes when they were observing their protégé. This issue could easily be fixed if the mentor had an off period that they could go observe the protégé. Or if the school district had the ability to hire retired teachers to use as their mentors. The mentors also felt that a year wasn’t enough time to fully mentor their protégé. This study concludes by stating “mentors cannot accomplish these feats merely by acquiring a title. They require appropriate training in educational theory, research, and principles of advising” (Shulman, 1986). Mentors must have the support from administration and it must be vocalized to them. The protégés in this study overwhelmingly agreed that having a

mentor helped them feel supported and not so alone during their first year as a teacher. This in turn gave them the confidence to not quit after the first year.

How Do School Districts Mentor New Teachers

This study was administered in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota and examined specific questions about mentoring. The questions included: “who provides mentoring, how does mentoring change after the first year, are mentors required to attend meetings/trainings, are mentors given stipends, and what barriers to mentors have” (DeCesare, 2016). In this study 69% of mentors were regular classroom teachers who did not receive any release time from their teaching position. It would have been more beneficial to both the mentor and protégé if they had a common planning period or even lunch time together so they could meet regularly or even last minute. 77% of the mentor programs only had a one year term of mentor program. It is unknown if the mentor/protégé continued their relationship. At the end of the year it would be beneficial if the mentor program was evaluated to see what improvements may or may not need to be incorporated. 52% of districts claimed that their mentors were observing their protégés. This is a very good thing because then the protégés are, hopefully, getting immediate feedback on how they are doing from an effective teacher. This will greatly help the teacher’s ability to teach their students and improve their teaching effectiveness. Only 32% of districts are training their mentors effectively. This number is not sufficient and must be addressed if school districts want to have an effective mentor program. Mentors must be trained in order to effectively implement a successful mentor program within a school or district. Without proper training, mentors will be continue and always continue to tell the protégé how they do it and not guide. A mentorship is not a “how to”,

but more of a best practices and self reflection. In this study 54% of districts are able to pay their mentors a stipend. Being able to pay mentors for the work, they are putting in helps them feel like they are needed and valued for the time.

Perceptions of Beginning Teachers

This study used 18 experienced teachers to mentor 10 new teachers each. These experienced teachers no longer had their own classes to teach, but instead were responsible for mentoring 10 new teachers. The criteria for being a protégé in the program was that one must be new to the district and have less than five years of teaching experience. According to this study “Most beginning teachers anticipate that discipline and classroom management will be the most difficult problem they will need to deal with” (Freiberg, 1994). But it was found that in reality, there were other issues that were more concerning to new teachers. First, it was found that the majority of new teachers felt they needed more assistance in understanding district policy and procedures. They stated that the district did not have an easily assessable handbook. This can be eliminated by administration having the handbook available upon being hired and having the new teachers sign a form saying they have received the information. New teachers also felt like they did not have enough teaching resources. This is when a mentor would be very beneficial. Having a mentor that teaches the same subject would be able to share resource with their protégé. “Teachers stated a high need to have a clearer definition of what was expected of them and that they needed more feedback on how they were doing” (Freiberg, 1994). This can be true for even veteran teachers. Administrators need to be able to give feedback to teachers in a timely and consistent form. In the teaching profession time is always a main concern; for teachers and administration. Timely

feedback must be a high priority in order to ensure that teachers are being effective. The protégés all reported that “Mentors were most helpful in providing encouragement and facilitating communication among educators in the districts as well as providing information and resources for instruction and classroom management” (Freiberg, 1994). Teachers also say they felt comfortable enough to ask other teachers for help or advice and didn’t only rely on their specific mentor. This is very important and good to hear because that means the schools climate and culture was welcoming of new teachers. It was unanimous that the one barrier all the programs had was the limited amount of funding available. This seems to be an issue across the boards.

Steps to Starting a Mentorship Program

When starting a mentor program there are some important steps that must be done in order to create an effective and meaningful program. First, if no mentorship program is in place, one must come up with the specific needs a school or district would want in their program. This can be done by surveying current new teachers on what could have benefited them in their first year of teaching. One could even ask veteran teachers to think back to their early years of teaching and what could have benefited them. Once the purpose of the mentorship program is created then the school must determine the criteria for how the mentors will be selected. It needs to be determined if the mentors will be matched up by content, level, or personality traits. “A committee composed of faculty and administrators is a good structure for determining the roles to be played by the mentors” (Heller, 1991). Third, it will need to be determined how long the mentorship program will last. This length can vary from an entire school year to a forever friendship between the two individuals. The forever friendship does not need to be dictated by the

mentorship program. Lastly, the mentorship program should be regularly evaluated on its effectiveness. To evaluate the program a survey or personal interview will need to be sent to the mentors as well as their protégés in order to improve effectiveness of the program.

Year Long Plan for Southern High School

At Southern High School, a school known for high academic standards and a competitive athletic program was noticing that teachers were leaving at the end of each year. It was determined that some teachers were simply retiring and others were leaving to work a different school. To better ensure that teachers were not leaving the school administration decided that a formal mentorship program would be beneficial. A survey was sent out to four teachers who were new to Southern High School. They all agreed that they were not assigned a specific mentor and that, although it wasn't their first year of teaching it would have been very beneficial for them to be assigned a mentor. The culture of each school is very unique and being in a new environment can sometimes feel overwhelming. These teachers stated that they just wanted someone to give them a "heads up" on things that would be happening during the course of the year. They did not feel like they needed help with classroom management or even curriculum, but instead simply someone to help guide them during specific times when the schedule may have been different. These teachers all agree that they would have liked someone to make them feel like they weren't alone and let them know that they were doing a good job.

Once it is determined how many new teachers will be on campus a committee will personally invite certain current teachers to be mentors. According to Heller (1991), this is a sample letter that could be sent out to each potential mentor:

Dear _____,

Southern High School will be hiring a number of new teachers next year. In order to introduce them to school routines and procedures and help them to become more effective instructors, we would like to assign a mentor to each new teacher. Because you are an excellent teacher and have made many valuable contributions to Southern High School over the years, I am inviting you to become a mentor in the Mentor Program.

As a mentor, you will be matched with a new teacher and asked to help him or her during the first year. You will receive mentor training on _____. At that time you will learn more about the roles and responsibilities of mentorship.

Please let me know if you are able to accept this invitation to become a mentor.

Sincerely,

The criteria for these mentors will include that they are excellent teachers with excellent classroom management skills and be able to use disciplinary methods that are consistent with school policy. These mentors will all have received proficient or higher scoring on their summative evaluations. The mentors should also be team players and

have positive attitudes. Mentors should be paired with protégés within the same subject area. If that is not possible then mentors and protégé should at minimum teach the same grade level. The mentors will meet once in order to be told what it is they will be doing to help guide their protégé. At this meeting they will receive a guide on their duties for the year. The mentors will have the same lunch and conference period as their protégé. If both periods cannot be accommodated because of scheduling conflicts a new mentor will be assigned. The major goal of the mentor program at Southern High School will be to ensure that all new teachers feel supported and encouraged all year long. The mentors will meet with their protégé at least weekly; even if that is a simple email or even a text to show the protégé that they are thinking about them. All involved in the program will meet monthly (during the school day) to make sure the protégés feel like they are not sinking deeper and deeper with no way out. Currently there isn't a set plan for each month because the needs of the protégés may change as the year progresses. The monthly meetings may include a Professional Learning Community. If possible, the mentors would be monetarily supported for the efforts in mentoring. If the money is not available the mentor will be given one or two days of extra paid time off. In the event that money is not available to pay for a substitute teacher an administrator may need to cover the mentor's class.

Conclusion

Our students are losing too many great teachers with the passion to teach too soon due to foreseen and fixable issues. A mentorship program will most certainly be able to be that change needed to reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession. A school district cannot expect teachers to stay in a profession that they feel not supported and

most certainly are not compensated for. In order to keep teachers, school district must implement an effective mentor program that can thrive and not burden the mentor or the teacher. In doing so school districts must also compensate the mentors for their work and time, and find the right mentors for each teacher. This is a long-term investment, not a quick fix, which must be implemented in order for the future doctors, lawyers, and plumbers to succeed.

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