



Guidance for Establishing and Strengthening Mentoring Programs

Introduction

Mentoring programs play a critical role in supporting teacher retention, improving instructional practice, and strengthening overall educator effectiveness, particularly for educators who are new to the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Effective mentoring programs provide individualized, job-embedded support, foster instructional improvement, and accelerate teacher development, ultimately improving student learning outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018).

The terms *induction* and *mentoring* are often interconnected and sometimes used interchangeably in practice. However, for the purposes of this document, we distinguish between the two to clarify their roles in supporting educators. In strong systems, mentoring is one component of a larger, more comprehensive induction program (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, EdResearch for Action, 2025).

Mentoring refers to the relationship between a beginning educator and a more experienced colleague who provides guidance, modeling, emotional support, and professional advice. This support is typically broader in scope and may include help with classroom management, understanding school culture, effective communication, and general strategies for navigating the early years of teaching (Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Avanti, 2023; ExcelinEd, 2025).

Induction refers to a structured, programmatic system of support designed to accelerate the professional growth of beginning educators through standards-based, instructional coaching. This approach involves regular observation, feedback cycles, goal setting, and alignment to teaching standards, with a strong focus on improving instructional practice and student outcomes (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; MDPI, 2023; Sorensen et al., 2022).

For the purposes of this document, we will use the term “**mentoring**” to refer to the strategies and actions used to establish or strengthen a mentoring program within a school or district.

In alignment with research, Rhode Island certification regulations promulgated in 2025 emphasize the importance of mentoring support for beginning educators. According to [The Regulations Governing the Certification of Educators in Rhode Island](#), approved by the Council



on Elementary and Secondary Education, employing agencies must provide mentoring support for most educators holding preliminary certification. In addition, certification regulation 1.3.3.f.1.b requires educational leaders to plan for and manage staff turnover and succession by ensuring opportunities for effective mentoring of personnel.

Moreover, Rhode Island General Laws, [Title 16, § 16-7.1-2](#), require every district receiving state education aid to include a process for mentoring new teachers in its district strategic plan

Purpose

This document is designed to help school and district leaders establish or strengthen mentoring programs for educators who are new to the profession. It outlines a framework for creating sustainable, high-quality mentoring systems that support professional growth and student achievement through strategic, collaborative support.

How to Use This Document

It is recommended that this document be used collaboratively, ideally with a team involved in developing or strengthening a mentoring program. It is intended as a guidance tool, not a one-stop-shop. School and district leaders can use this resource to explore research-based best practices and consider actionable steps for building a supportive, sustainable mentoring system. While the primary audience is leadership, the guide can also be used alongside mentors to provide them with tools and strategies to effectively support beginning educators.

Program Goals

The mentoring program should focus on:

- **Supporting beginning educators' professional growth:** Helping them navigate challenges, strengthening their content knowledge and pedagogical skills, and cultivating a positive classroom environment.
- **Promoting retention:** Ensuring that beginning educators feel connected, valued, and supported, increasing their likelihood of staying in the profession long-term.
- **Improving student outcomes:** Empowering beginning educators to implement effective instructional practices that foster equitable student success. Consider establishing induction practices as part of the larger mentoring program to support growth in instruction.



Roles and Responsibilities

The Mentee:

- **Play an active role in the mentoring relationship.** A mentee can do this by offering critical reflections on his/her own practice and identifying areas in which assistance is needed. A mentee may also decide to share elements of his or her evaluation to discuss goals, receive targeted feedback, and assess progress.
- **Seek help.** The mentee must understand that he or she must seek out support from team members, be forthcoming in communicating classroom issues, and remain open to feedback to develop as a professional. The mentor-mentee relationship is meant to be confidential; mentees should take advantage of the relationship and obtain assistance as needed.
- **Observe effective teachers at work.** The mentee should adhere to a schedule of observations of various effective teachers. The mentee may keep a log to record and reflect on the diversity of their styles.

The Mentor:

- **Facilitate a strong start to the year.** Mentors can help mentees launch into a productive year by making sure they know where to obtain all needed materials, are familiar with routines and schedules, and curriculum expectations.
- **Provide instructional support.** This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Regular observation of and conferencing with the mentee.
 - Modeling instructional strategies or facilitating opportunities for the mentee to observe other effective teachers.
 - Provide advice on creating a positive, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment.
 - Support in teaching and learning standards of the Rhode Island Curriculum Frameworks through co-planning of lessons.
- **Provide professional support.** Mentees need to be informed of district, school, and grade level/content team data and goals.
- **Provide personal support.** Mentors can help relieve the stress mentees experience by introducing them to other faculty members and helping the mentee to put problems in perspective with support and encouragement.
- **Maintain a confidential relationship with the mentee.** It is important that the mentee be able to discuss problems openly with the mentor, so that they may be addressed in a



timely and informed manner. The role of the mentor is to support the mentee, not to evaluate him/her.

- **Serve as a liaison.** The mentor should have the knowledge and skills to refer the mentee to other teachers and educational resources, so that the mentee is exposed to a variety of perspectives and instructional practices.
- **Serve as a resource.** Inform the mentee of opportunities and supports provided by the school, district, and professional associations.
- **Serve as a teacher leader.** Mentors are identified leaders within a school community. As such, they share responsibility with administrative leadership and other colleagues to promote a school culture that emphasizes ongoing adult learning, the sharing of best practices, and ongoing professional development to support the learning and achievement of all students.

The School and/or District Leader:

The roles and responsibilities of school leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, deans) and district leaders (e.g., curriculum directors, beginning teacher supervisors) can vary depending on the context. In some settings, the principal may lead the mentoring program, while in others, academic deans, assistant principals, or other school or district leaders may take on this role. Regardless of the role, the following are recommended practices for fostering and supporting a culture that strengthens mentoring programs.

- **Establish a collegial school culture** that supports professional collaboration among beginning and experienced teachers.
- **Facilitate the relationship between the mentor and mentee.** The school and/or district leader should ensure regular meetings between mentor and mentee and confirm that both are satisfied with their participation. They are also encouraged to meet with both parties periodically to gather feedback on the mentoring program and provide additional support.
- **Conduct an orientation program for mentees and mentors.**
- **Review the evaluation system.** The leader should ensure that the beginning teacher is informed early in the year about the district's educator evaluation system and procedures and is evaluated on schedule.
- **Oversee the selection of mentors.** Mentors and mentees should be matched using clear criteria, prioritizing grade level and/or subject matter while also considering the specific needs of the mentee.
- **Communicate regularly with school mentors.** While maintaining confidentiality, the leader should have opportunities to discuss the general needs of mentees and set



priorities for professional learning. Open communication ensures consistent and streamlined feedback for teachers.

While many schools and districts often employ instructional coaches, it is critical to distinguish their roles from that of mentors. Mentors provide holistic support, while coaches typically focus on targeted instructional goals. **However, collaboration between mentors, coaches, and school leaders is essential to ensure that educators receive consistent and coherent support (Killion, 2017).** Without this coordination, there is a risk of delivering mixed messages or redundant efforts, which may hinder rather than help teacher growth.

1. Program Design

Considerations:

- **Who are the mentors?** Mentors should be experienced educators who have demonstrated strong instructional skills, are passionate about supporting the growth of others, and have a solid understanding of adult learning theory (andragogy) and how it shapes effective professional learning for adults.
- **Who are the mentees?** Define the target group, such as first-year teachers, teachers in their first few years, or teachers transitioning to new grade levels, subjects, or are new to the school and/or district.
- **Structure of the program:** Decide on the program's duration (e.g., one school year), meeting frequency (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly), and format (e.g., one-on-one, small group mentoring, or a combination). Additionally, consider how mentoring fits within a larger induction system so that educators experience coordinated support rather than isolated activities.

Checklist for Action:

- Identify potential mentors who demonstrate strong teaching skills and commitment to supporting educators.
- Define the goals and expectations for both mentors and mentees.
- Determine the duration and frequency of the mentoring program.
- Create a mentoring agreement outlining roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Ensure mentors have a strong understanding of adult learning theory (andragogy) and know how to apply it to effectively support the developmental needs of adult learners.



2. Mentoring Training

Considerations:

- **Mentor preparation:** Ensure mentors are equipped with the skills necessary to provide guidance, feedback, and emotional support to their mentees.
- **Mentee orientation:** Orient beginning educators to the program, highlighting the value of mentoring and how to maximize the experience.

Checklist for Action:

- Develop mentor training materials, including best practices for feedback, communication, and problem-solving.
- Schedule an orientation session with mentors and mentees to explain the program's goals and expectations.
- Provide ongoing support and professional development opportunities for mentors (e.g., check-ins, group meetings, resources).

3. Matching Process

Considerations:

- **Compatibility:** Match mentors and mentees based on teaching grade level, subject area, and personal teaching style to ensure a positive and productive relationship.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Ensure the matching process takes into account diverse backgrounds, experiences, and teaching philosophies to enrich the mentoring experience.

Checklist for Action:

- Create a rubric or questionnaire to assess the strengths, needs, and preferences of both mentors and mentees.
- Consider survey or interview responses to match mentors and mentees effectively.
- Review matches with program administrators to ensure compatibility.

4. Ongoing Monitoring and Support

Considerations:

- **Regular check-ins:** Ensure that mentors and mentees have consistent opportunities for feedback and reflection throughout the program.
- **Program evaluation:** Collect feedback from both mentors and beginning educators to assess the effectiveness of the mentoring program and identify areas for improvement.



Checklist for Action:

- Establish a system for regular check-ins (e.g., bi-monthly or quarterly evaluations).
- Develop tools to track the progress of the mentoring relationship (e.g., logs, reflection journals).
- Set up a process for gathering anonymous feedback on the mentoring experience.
- Schedule an end-of-year evaluation to assess outcomes and make recommendations for future improvements.

5. Program Sustainability

Considerations:

- **Long-term commitment:** A successful mentoring program requires sustained support from leadership and a consistent commitment to program quality.
- **Institutionalizing the program:** Work toward embedding the mentoring program, and the broader induction system it supports, into the fabric of the school's or district's professional learning culture. This ensures that mentoring is not an isolated initiative but part of a coordinated set of supports for new educators, including orientation, professional learning, and ongoing feedback.

Checklist for Action:

- Consider funding for the program, including stipends for mentors.
- Advocate for the program's sustainability by presenting evidence of its effectiveness to school board/committee (e.g., retention rates, feedback from beginning educators).
- Develop a succession plan for bringing new mentors into the program each year to ensure continuity and growth.

Conclusion

A mentoring program is a critical component of supporting beginning educators. By providing guidance, professional learning, and ongoing support, schools and districts can help beginning educators succeed and feel connected to the broader educational community. This program will not only benefit beginning educators but also improve student outcomes and foster a collaborative, growth-oriented school culture.



Tools and Resources

[Designing Teacher Induction for the Long-Haul:](#) This webinar focuses on building effective induction programs that provide new teachers with two years of job-embedded professional learning supported by rigorously selected and trained induction coaches.

[Massachusetts Department of Education - Handbook for Teacher Induction and Mentoring:](#) This handbook serves as a comprehensive guide for the development and implementation of teacher induction and mentoring programs, supporting educators as they transition into the profession or adjust to a new district. Embedded are checklists, conversation starters, sample agendas, and other turn-key resources.

[Massachusetts Department of Education – Related Tools:](#) Six tools developed through a partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Comprehensive Center Network.

[Redefining Mentoring for New Staffing Models:](#) This webinar explores how strategic staffing can transform new teacher induction by embedding mentoring into team-based models. Instead of expecting new teachers to be “Day One ready,” strategic placements offer access to collective expertise and relational support, accelerating growth through everyday collaboration.

[The New Teacher Center – High-Quality Mentoring & Instructional Coaching Practices:](#) A resource for education leaders seeking to create and/or improve programs with practices that result in improved student learning and teacher retention.

[The New Teacher Center - Webinars:](#) A collection of webinars and case studies designed to support school leaders and mentors in building and strengthening their mentoring and induction systems.



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