



Highlighting PIC Work...

In Fall of 2009, the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) began working with the New Teacher Center (NTC) to develop an online mentoring program for novice special education teachers. With funding from the PIC and two partner states, e-Mentoring for Student Success-Special Education (eMSS-SE) was piloted in Louisiana and Nevada in Spring of 2010. Nineteen mentors, all veteran special education teachers, were matched with 68 mentees. Mentors and mentees were matched according to grade level and exceptionality (mild/moderate, significant, autism spectrum disorders, emotional disturbance, and developmental delay.) In Fall of 2010, the program expanded to include additional states and individual locales. Future plans include the addition of a sixth exceptionality category of sensory impairments.

About Us...

We are the National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities (Personnel Improvement Center), a federally funded technical assistance and dissemination project, created on October 1, 2008 through a cooperative agreement, H325C080001, between the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education.



WINTER 2011

IN THIS BRIEF...

You will learn how states, local school districts and higher education are collaborating to provide high quality mentoring experiences for their novice teachers.

CREATING MENTORING PROGRAMS AS A MEANS OF RETAINING QUALIFIED SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL

by Eve Müller, Ph.D.

In response to high rates of attrition, increasing numbers of states and localities are developing mentoring programs as a means of retaining qualified special education personnel. Based on examples drawn from around the country, including states and localities with which the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) has worked, this practice brief describes various mentoring models as well as identifying essential elements of effective mentoring programs for special education personnel, including related service providers.

MENTORING MODELS

Traditional Mentoring

This model involves mentors meeting one-on-one and face-to-face with mentees and sometimes supplementing meetings with phone or email contact. Emphasis is upon the individual mentor/mentee relationship and the ability of the mentor to provide support based on his or her training and expertise. Examples of mentoring programs for special educators that have adopted a traditional model include Clark County School District in Nevada (<http://sssdprofdev.cc.sd.net/Mentors/mentors.html>) and the Chicago New Teacher Center, based on the New Teacher Center's (NTC) instructional coaching model and that serves Chicago Public Schools (<http://www.chicagontc.org/>). Both the Clark County and Chicago programs provide full-time itinerant mentors who visit the classrooms of all new special education teachers. The Clark County program also provides site-based mentors for some.

Mentoring Peer Groups

This model, a variation on traditional mentoring, includes multiple mentees paired with one or more mentors. It emphasizes not only the mentor/mentee relationship, but also the importance of relationships established among peers. One example of this is Mentor-Link, developed at the University of Northern Florida in 2001 and implemented in districts throughout the northern part of the state as part of Florida's State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). Mentor-Link uses "mentoring pods," a small cohort of special education teachers meeting weekly with one or more mentors, usually all from the same school. Mentoring pods are based on the assumption that helping teachers understand and find a place within the particular culture of their school is critical to teacher retention.

E-Mentoring

Another variation on traditional mentoring is e-mentoring. In collaboration with the PIC, the NTC piloted an e-mentoring program, e-Mentoring for Student Success – Special Education (eMSS-SE), in the Spring of 2010 for new special educators in Louisiana and Nevada (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/eMSS/menu.php?p=home>). (see text box). eMSS-SE was adapted from the NTC's successful e-mentoring program for math and science teachers. The e-mentoring model emphasizes flexibility (e.g., mentors and mentees can engage in asynchronous conversations from any place and at any time) and multiple online support structures for novice



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teachers. For example, NTC's e-mentoring web portal provides a private area for mentors to communicate with mentees; an area where small, self-selected groups of mentees can participate up to three times per year in the facilitated study of specific topics tailored to their unique needs; and a drop-in area where all mentees can participate in discussion of a "topic of the month" facilitated by special education teacher leaders and university faculty. Access to mentors in math and science also enhances the novice special educator's skills in these academic content areas.

Mentoring Related Service Providers

Related service providers, often working on an itinerant basis, can experience even greater job isolation than their site-based special education colleagues. Progressus Therapy is a national company that provides traditional mentoring to new school-based related service providers including occupational therapists (OTs), physical therapists (PTs) and speech-language pathologists (SLPs)—via its Career Launch program (<http://www.progressustherapy.com/Student-Info/Career-Launch.aspx>). In addition, the PIC is working with several Texas early intervention (EI) programs to set up a private online community for EI personnel that include related service providers. This community will be facilitated by expert mentors in the delivery of EI services.



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS

In developing mentoring programs for special education personnel, it is critical to consider the following program elements.

Eligibility

Most programs provide mentoring for "novice" special education personnel, defined as those in their first few (i.e., first, second and/or third) years in the classroom. Although Clark County provides mentoring to new special education teachers for up to three years, mentees receive the most intensive support during their first year in the classroom, with progressively less support in years two and three. Some programs, such as Florida's site-based Mentor-Link program, may also allow veteran special education teachers, paraprofessionals or even general education teachers interested in developing skills for supporting students

with disabilities to participate. Career Launch provides "mentor partners" to related service providers during their first year working in school-based settings.

Mentor Selection

Many programs involve a rigorous screening and selection process. For example, eMSS-SE requires that potential mentors complete a three-week, 15-20 hour online summer institute. Candidates who complete the training are evaluated using a mentor rubric for the quality and timeliness of their online posts, as well as their content expertise. Those who score well then enter the "mentor pool." Clark County's site-based mentors are identified based on recommendations from school- and district-level administrators as well as interviews. Progressus Therapy's Career Launch program guidebook lists criteria for mentor selection and Florida's Mentor-Link mentors are selected based on well documented reputations for being "natural mentors."

Mentor Training

Well-prepared mentors are critical to the success of any mentoring program. eMSS-SE requires mentor training with compensation as well as offering ongoing professional development for mentors, including a special section on the NTC e-mentoring website that enables e-mentors to converse with one another and receive guidance from a trained mentor facilitator. Career Launch gives mentor partners a guidebook ("Creating Positive Mentoring Relationships") detailing expectations as well as providing mentoring of mentors. Special education mentors in Chicago are paid to participate in a 12-day mentor academy, as well as monthly forums differentiated to meet the needs of mentors. Clark County requires orientation for all mentors and two additional trainings per year.

Matching of Mentors/Mentees

Criteria for matching mentors varies from program to program. Mentoring programs designed specifically for special education teachers provide mentors with special education expertise. Additional matching may be based on academic subject, disability category, age range, geographical proximity, or a





combination of these things. eMSS-SE allows the most precise matching based on grade level and disability category, because geographical proximity is not a concern. For example, in order to match a high-school teacher of students with autism, NTC can go out of state to identify an appropriate mentor. In the case of Florida's Mentor-Link program, on the other hand, which focuses on helping teachers acclimate to the cultures of their particular schools, priority is given to matching by building. Career Launch matches OTs with OTs, PTs with PTs, and SLPs with SLPs, as well as matching by geographical proximity and content area. Mentor/mentee ratios vary considerably. Traditional site-based programs may simply match one mentor with one mentee. Programs using full-time itinerant mentors, such as those in Chicago and Clark County, may assign as many as 12 mentees to a given mentor. eMSS-SE assigns one mentor to approximately six or seven mentees.

Frequency and Type of Contact

Again, requirements vary considerably from program to program. Chicago's program requires all mentors to meet with mentees at least three times per month for 90 minutes and suggests even greater frequency for special educator mentors. eMSS-SE expects its mentors to post comments/responses at least two-to-three times per week and also evaluates mentors based on the quality of their interactions. Mentors from Florida's Mentor-Link program are asked to spend a minimum of two hours per week with their mentoring pods. Career Launch requires a minimum of 30 hours per year of contact for OTs and PTs and 36 hours for SLPs. Although release time for mentees and mentors who are full-time teachers is considered best practice, budgetary constraints and the logistics of hiring substitutes means that few of these types of mentoring programs provide it. As a consequence, most mentoring in programs that use full-time teachers as mentors takes place during preparation time, before or after school.



Additional Induction Activities

Many programs supplement their mentoring services with orientation for new mentees and ongoing professional development activities. For example, Clark County offers an extensive orientation for first year teachers and recently added a component of the district's website called InterAct to its special education mentoring program that includes online trainings as well as technical support and interactive chat with other special education cohort members. Career Launch provides year-round training on specific topics and plans to launch a web-based component that will enable all mentors and mentees to interact virtually with one another. Florida's mentoring pods receive training materials and resources tailored to each teacher's identified needs.

Compensation

Chicago and Clark County's full-time itinerant mentors are released from their teaching responsibilities, but continue to receive their teaching salaries and benefits packages. eMSS-SE gives mentors a small honorarium for participating in the summer institute (even if they don't end up joining the mentor pool) and pays mentors on a per mentee basis. Career Launch and Mentor-Link provide stipends for mentors and Clark County's site-based mentors receive stipends as well as monetary compensation for participating in mentor training activities after work hours. In Clark County, *mentees* are also compensated for the time they spend attending voluntary trainings after work hours on various special education-related topics. Nevada and Louisiana eMSS-SE mentees participating in year-long online issues seminars are eligible for course credits and professional development hours.

Accountability

High quality mentoring programs incorporate accountability measures, including the tracking of numbers of participants, satisfaction levels of mentors and mentees, intention to remain in the field and retention rates over time. Chicago's program, for example, holds mentors accountable by evaluating their effectiveness based on the NTC's instructional coach framework. Florida conducts focus groups at the end of each year in order to gather qualitative feedback to supplement written surveys completed by mentors and mentees. eMSS-SE publishes an annual report documenting both qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Career Launch conducts annual surveys of mentees as well as comparing retention rates for Career Launch participants with retention of nonparticipants.





Personnel Improvement Center

National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities

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Acknowledgments. The PIC gratefully acknowledges the following people for participating in interviews and reviewing an earlier version of this document: Jean Blosser, Vice President, Therapy Programs and Quality, Progressus Therapy; Julia Causey, Program Manager, Professional Learning, Division for Special Education Supports, Georgia Department of Education; Debra Dixon, Education Program Consultant, Louisiana Department of Education; Sharon Grady, Outreach Coordinator, Chicago New Teacher Center; Kathryn Krudwig, Former Director of Mentor-Link and External Evaluator, Florida State Personnel Development Grant; Cathy Mellor, Director, Professional Development Department, Student Support Services Division, Clark County School District, Nevada; Alyson Mike, Director of Online Professional Development, New Teacher Center; and Ann Nason, Supervisor of Special Education, Rapides Parish, Louisiana.

For further information on the induction and mentoring of beginning special education teachers, please go to the National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) at <http://www.ncipp.org>, a source for induction and mentoring in special education. NCIPP's Induction Insights are a collection of briefs derived from longer research syntheses that target key topical areas in special education induction and mentoring. The briefs are geared toward specific audiences: administrators, policymakers, teacher educators, beginning teachers, and parents.



This practice brief is part of a series intended to provide examples of how states and localities throughout the nation are employing recruitment and retention strategies to address personnel shortages in the area of special education, early intervention and related services. The series was produced by the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) and highlights recruitment and retention efforts within states and localities supported by the PIC. There are no copyright restrictions on these practice briefs, but the PIC requests that proper citation be used.

