

# EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS:

SUPPORTING OUR  
OWN THROUGH  
MENTORING



A MANUAL FOR ESTABLISHING  
ESP MENTORING PROGRAMS

[www.nea.org/ESPMentoring](http://www.nea.org/ESPMentoring)



**ESP**  
EDUCATION SUPPORT  
PROFESSIONALS

## **NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

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# EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS (ESP): SUPPORTING OUR OWN THROUGH MENTORING

## **NEA Representative Assembly Resolution D-10 Mentor Programs**

The National Education Association believes that mentor programs are a means of enhancing the professional expertise of employees and retaining quality educators. The Association also believes that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of such programs must be negotiated or cooperatively developed and maintained by the school district and the local affiliate. The Association further believes that the duties and responsibilities of all parties must be clearly defined and uniformly administered. Mentors must be selected through a defined process with articulated criteria, be properly trained and compensated, and be provided with adequate time to fulfill their responsibilities. The state or local authority has the obligation to provide hold-harmless protection. The Association further believes that any documentation that results from the mentoring process must be confidential and the sole property of the person mentored and must not be included in the participant's personnel file. The Association also believes that any verbal conversations that result from the mentoring process must also remain confidential.

## **From "Contributions Made by Experienced Educators" NEA Position Statement (New Business Item 2016-58)**

... Furthermore, veteran and experienced ESP also serve as invaluable, cost-effective resources to new and early career support professionals as well as to students and families... Mentoring provided to early career ESP by their veteran and experienced colleagues enhances their professional practice and results in the retention of high-quality employees. It also ensures greater job satisfaction and higher morale and results in less employee turnover. ESP mentoring ensures that the ESP community has a greater voice in the workplace, more opportunities to build their own professional pathways, and increased abilities at assisting students who are striving for success. ...



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# INTRODUCTION

## **MENTORING: MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER**

The rapid changes in our world today have made education an increasingly demanding and complex environment.

Students from low-income homes are now the majority in U.S. public schools, presenting greater challenges related to housing, medical, and nutritional needs of students. Schools now function as mental health systems, with staff being required to manage social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Schools have heightened security and safety measures and must address issues of substance abuse, school violence, and bullying on their campuses. Employees are expected to utilize complex digital tools such as the Internet on a daily basis, and to learn other new technologies as they emerge.

Educators are tasked with interacting with multiple external service organizations, bridging school, home, and community to ensure that the needs of the whole student are addressed. Educators are asked to become more and more specialized in their individual career fields, and are called upon to respond to growing diversity among the students they serve—different cultures, languages, backgrounds, and abilities. Special education initiatives and individual education plans (IEPs) must be strictly adhered to. Research on multiple forms of intelligence and different learning styles requires that school employees continuously adapt and grow.

And while much of the responsibility for these increasingly complex demands fall on ESP, they still often have had to make do with little to no support. While ESP account for more than one third of today's public education workforce, they often have inadequate or nonexistent professional development and training. That is why formal mentoring programs are more important than ever.

## MENTORING IS PART OF THE ANSWER

The National Education Association has been taking steps to recognize the vital role ESP play as equal and essential members in education. To that end, it is seeking better professional development and supports for ESP which includes ESP supporting ESP through formal programs of mentoring. This manual is designed to assist state and local Associations and/or school districts/universities to develop and implement mentoring programs for ESP.

Mentoring for ESP, similar to the long-established mentoring relationships between new and experienced teachers, can help ESP deal with the growing complexity of their careers and meet the increasing demands placed on education systems. Mentoring for early career ESP (those in their first five years) is especially critical to ensuring seamless integration into their new careers and the education community.

### ESP mentoring programs are essential in order to:

- ▶ Support ESP in the development of personal and professional skills and knowledge from day one and early in their careers.
- ▶ Ensure that the ESP community has a greater voice in the workplace, more opportunities to build their own professional pathways, and increased abilities at assisting students who are striving for success.
- ▶ Retain high quality support professionals in the education workforce.
- ▶ Contribute to the overall mission of closing student achievement gaps.
- ▶ Elevate all of the ESP careers.

\* Throughout this manual, the term "school" is intended to include both K-12 schools and public colleges and universities. NEA represents ESP in K-12 and higher education institutions.



# WHO ARE EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS (ESP)?

ESP are critical members of the education workforce. There are more than 2.8 million ESP in our nation's public schools, universities, and colleges, and one out of every three public school employees is an ESP. ESP meet the needs of the whole student, promoting quality education and fostering positive learning environments. ESP make up nearly a half million of NEA's more than three million members and are represented by the following nine career families.



**CLERICAL SERVICES:** Secretarial, clerical, financial, and administrative support



**CUSTODIAL AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES:** Building and grounds maintenance and repair



**FOOD SERVICES:** Food services, planning, preparation, and delivery



**HEALTH AND STUDENT SERVICES:** Nursing, health and therapy support; community, family, parent, and welfare services



**PARAEDUCATORS:** Instructional and non-instructional support



**SECURITY SERVICES:** School guards and security resource personnel, security specialists



**SKILLED TRADES:** Electricians, carpenters, painters, heating and ventilation specialists, machine operations, and printing services



**TECHNICAL SERVICES:** Computer, audio-visual, and language technical support; media, public relations, writing, and art specialties



**TRANSPORTATION SERVICES:** Bus driving and delivery services and vehicle maintenance

Source: 2015 NEA ESP Data Book: A Workforce and Membership Profile of Education Support Professionals.



# WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is not a new concept in education. Historically, it has been used in the context of a one-on-one relationship between a novice teacher and a veteran teacher to develop the new teacher's competencies and skills in the classroom.

Mentoring for ESP is based on the same principle: **it is a partnership between two individuals (the mentor and mentee) that focuses on the common goal of developing an ESP's personal and professional skills through a strong learning relationship.** The mentoring process pairs an employee with a colleague (a mentor) who has the expertise and desire to help the mentee realize his or her career-related goals. The support offered by a mentor can and should extend beyond what an employee receives from a certification, in-service training, orientation program, on-the-job training, or supervision by a manager. Mentoring is the sharing of knowledge and expertise in a real-life, on-the-job context.

Mentors act as sounding boards. While many voices critique employees during formal evaluations, mentors are able to offer the most valuable advice during their day-to-day reflection time with the mentee. The best mentors hear their mentee, offer guidance, ideas and support, and ultimately, steer them towards success. They also help them laugh at their failures and move on.

## Issues appropriate for a mentoring relationship could include:

- ▶ professional development and career-related goals
- ▶ work habits
- ▶ interpersonal communications
- ▶ acceptance of differences—cultural, ethnic, gender, language
- ▶ conflict resolution
- ▶ team building
- ▶ any other issues the mentee may identify as needing support

The mentoring relationship is primarily one-on-one, but it also can be thought of as a **mosaic of assistance**, with the mentor calling upon other resources in his or her network of contacts to address specific needs of the mentee. For example, a mentoring partnership of two custodians might consult with other individuals, not necessarily maintenance staff, who can lend support in areas beyond specific custodial and maintenance issues, such as interactions with students or time management.

For mentoring to be successful, both parties must be committed to the process. The mentee is responsible for identifying his or her goals often with the help of the mentor. The mentor is charged with guiding the mentee toward realizing those goals. While the length of the relationship is determined by the goals and objectives identified by the mentor and mentee in their first meeting, both should be prepared to commit substantial time and energy to the process.

There is no set framework for a mentoring relationship; each relationship is different. The process can last for a few months, a year, or a few years. Meetings occur according to schedules determined by the pair: some may meet once a week, others once a month, and others possibly every few months. Some pairs meet in person; others communicate by phone and e-mail. These specifics are agreed to by the mentor and mentee at the beginning of their relationship, or are specified by the ESP mentoring program.

While the mentee is the primary beneficiary of the mentoring process, the mentor also benefits. A mentoring partnership allows a mentor to hone his or her skills in a variety of different situations, building their own professional and leadership skills. They become involved in the wider school community and derive professional and personal satisfaction from helping their colleagues. A mentoring program can also strengthen the Association or school district/university by fostering relationships across ESP career families and by creating ESP leaders in both the Association and the school community.

### Face-to-Face or Long Distance Meetings?

Most ESP mentors and mentees report that meeting face to face, whether at the workplace or outside of it—at a coffee shop, for instance—produces the most solid relationship and the best learning opportunities. Certainly, the first mentor-mentee meeting should always be in person. However, there are other ways partners can communicate after their first meeting, including:

- phone calls
- e-mail
- video chats (e.g., Skype, FaceTime)
- text chats

While these other methods can pose some challenges, such as the inability to pick up on visual or social cues, they are less time-consuming and in some cases can make providing honest feedback easier. When using these other methods, it's important to pay attention to non-verbal and non-visual communication and also to ask for specifics, such as summarizing your meetings so that you can ensure the accuracy of your perceptions.



# WHAT MENTORING IS NOT!

## **Mentoring is not orientation or onboarding.**

Mentors can certainly help new ESP employees learn the ropes—orienting them to the culture of the district/university, policy, programs and schedules, but orientation is not the primary goal of a mentoring relationship. The mentor's role goes beyond helping the mentee navigate their new working environment on their first day.

### **A Word About Orientation**

While we've stressed that mentoring is not orientation, NEA recognizes the value of and need for robust orientation programs for ESP. Orientation programs acquaint new ESP with their new career and the culture and systems of the school and the district/university. All school orientation programs—including those for teachers—should address the roles and responsibilities of ESP, so that all educators understand what everyone in the school does to ensure student success. Often, teachers do not fully understand the range of skills and responsibilities of ESP and may underestimate their role in the educational process.

## **Mentoring is not a means to a promotion.**

For a mentee, involvement in the mentoring process offers no promises beyond personal growth and professional development. It is not a part of a performance evaluation and is not tied to future compensation or advancement (unless otherwise specified).

## **Mentoring is not therapy.**

An employee may have personality conflicts at work, in which case a mentor might be able to suggest ways to deal with the conflict on a professional basis. If an employee is experiencing difficulties in his or her personal life, a mentor might be able to suggest counseling, if necessary. However, the relationship should not develop into a situation where the mentor is expected to solve personal or emotional problems. And while a mentee may share personal information, it is vital that the mentor keep these conversations strictly confidential.



### **I NEED A MENTOR!**

Tim is a custodian working in an elementary school. Tim has been concerned about the use of pesticides and its impact on the health of students and staff. He wants to learn more about non-toxic methods so he can propose alternatives to the approach his school currently uses, but he's not sure if the administrators will be receptive. Luckily, he has a mentor he can talk to.

### **Mentoring is not about evaluation.**

To avoid conflicts of interest and unforeseen consequences, only ESP—not supervisors or teachers—should mentor ESP. While everyone has had mentoring moments with their manager or supervisor, the manager's responsibility is to everyone they manage, not just one person. A mentoring partnership is not a power relationship; it's a reciprocal relationship between two people. The mentor should never be the evaluator.

### **Mentoring is not coaching.**

Coaching is driven by specific content and goals, such as developing certain professional skills. While coaching can and should occur during mentoring, it's more likely to involve the mentor consulting his or her [mosaic of assistance](#) and recommending an appropriate professional coach to address specific needs of the mentee.

### **Mentoring is not a time for merely socializing.**

Meetings between mentoring partners can be fun, but they should go beyond socializing. Mentoring is a serious and intentional opportunity to develop skills and learn how to cope with career-related situations and challenges. Meeting goals should be established, and both the mentor and mentee should work to ensure that meetings are productive.

### **Mentoring is not a way to recruit new members.**

While a mentoring program may be one of the benefits of Association membership, the surest way to discredit it in the eyes of the employer is to use it as a way to organize ESP employees into the Association. The program should exist on its own merits—a way to support new or struggling ESP employees. If the Association is seen in a positive light as a result, so much the better.

### **Mentoring is not simply a way to earn extra money.**

Your Association may have developed a mentoring program that compensates mentors for their time and effort. While the additional funds may be desirable, that should not be your primary reason for becoming a mentor. It's not a "second job;" it's an avocation—a source of personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.



# WHY SHOULD WE MENTOR ESP?

Education support professionals need high quality mentoring programs and should not be working in isolation without feedback and support. ESP play a vital role in the education workforce, but often are accorded less than equal status in the staff hierarchy. This frequently results in inadequate opportunities for professional learning and support. Through mentoring, ESP can support other ESP in attaining the skills necessary to progress in their individual careers and build ESP professional communities. ESP Mentoring programs benefit everyone—the mentee, the mentor, and the school district/ university.

## HOW MENTEES BENEFIT

Mentees clearly benefit the most from the mentoring process. Mentoring increases their knowledge, both technical and organizational, which improves their career performance and may also hone skills that are not career-related. Working with a mentor can develop a mentee's ability to work collaboratively and cooperatively and provides them an opportunity to receive immediate feedback from a trusted colleague. Mentoring also helps ESP adapt to the continuing changes and evolution of their careers. Most importantly, it provides one-on-one professional support so that a mentee can improve their ability to help students succeed—the mission of public education.

### Benefits include:

- ▶ increased professional skills and improved interpersonal skills
- ▶ identification of possible career paths or professional growth opportunities
- ▶ greater career satisfaction
- ▶ enhanced ability to help students succeed



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Roxanne is a secretary in the front office. She's recently been tasked with creating reports that involve producing complex charts and tables. Roxanne has taken the online computer training provided by her employer but is still confused! Luckily, her mentor has connected her with another staff person who is an expert and can teach Roxanne the ins and outs of the program. Roxanne is grateful for her mentor.

## HOW MENTORS BENEFIT

The benefits of mentoring are reciprocal. While mentees are the clearest winners, mentors also benefit, coming away from time spent with mentees with fresh insights, new information, and increased appreciation of their own careers. They can gain new perspectives on problem-solving, improve their listening and communication skills, and develop new roles and responsibilities as leaders in the work setting. Personal interactions with other ESP and an enhanced understanding of other employees' careers can foster a sense of teamwork and across-the-worksites solidarity.

### **Benefits include:**

- ▶ new perspectives on problem solving and improved communication skills
- ▶ recognition and respect as leaders
- ▶ greater career satisfaction
- ▶ enhanced ability to help students succeed

## HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS/UNIVERSITIES BENEFIT

The mentor and mentee are not the only beneficiaries—the entire education community gains from the program. Most importantly, a mentoring program furthers the underlying mission of the school district/university as a whole: ensuring student success. In addition to enhancing employees' professional expertise, mentoring helps new or transferred employees adjust to the school, the district/university, and the local community. This leads to higher employee job satisfaction and stability, and a higher rate of retention of skilled employees. Mentoring should complement existing new employee training and orientation and provide opportunities for continuous improvement of career-related skills. A well-qualified ESP workforce can directly benefit all sectors of the education community.

Additionally, mentoring enhances ESPs' abilities to serve as role models for students. When students observe support professionals in their day-to-day careers, they may gain a broader understanding of other rewarding career possibilities in education.

### **Benefits include:**

- ▶ increased career-related skills and professionalism
- ▶ greater career satisfaction and less turnover
- ▶ role models for students
- ▶ enhanced ability to help students succeed



## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT IS VITAL

ESP informally mentor colleagues in the workplace on a regular basis, but formal mentoring programs set up with institutional support are less vulnerable to losing focus and momentum and are most likely to succeed. While the Association should take an active role in advocating for and setting up a mentoring program, it should always seek to partner with the school district/university. The ideal situation is to work with the employer during bargaining to include mentoring in the contract (should your state allow collective bargaining). Having such language can help ensure the continuation and progression of the program.

(See "Sample ESP Mentoring Contract Language" on the next page for sample language that can be used as a starting point for contract negotiations.)



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Hannah is in charge of the computer lab at the community college's media center. When Willie, the librarian, communicates with Hannah it is always rude and dismissive. Hannah has tried talking to Willie about his behavior, but she feels that it has only made things go from bad to worse. Hannah wishes she had a mentor.

## SAMPLE ESP MENTORING CONTRACT LANGUAGE

### Article X ESP Mentoring Program

Education Support Professionals (ESP) are in every sense of the word, "educators." ESP work in education to keep students healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. It is the intent of the District to ensure ESP have successful careers; and towards that goal, we establish the ESP Mentoring Program.

- X.1** The District shall assign an administrator as the Mentoring Program Coordinator. The Mentoring Program Coordinator shall be responsible for establishing the mentor selection process and any other administrative task that contributes to the effective operation of the program.
- X.2** Each newly hired ESP shall be assigned a mentor for their first year of employment by the designated Mentoring Program Coordinator.
- X.3** The purpose of mentors is to help new ESP identify and reach their career-related goals. Mentors are a source of information for the new employee, assist the new employee in understanding job expectations, orient the employee to the physical plant, and assist in providing training.
- X.4** Mentors shall be ESP with at least two years of experience, be in good standing with the District, and shall volunteer for the program.
- X.5** Mentors shall not evaluate nor contribute to the evaluation of the new employee. Mentors may recommend professional development/training for the benefit of the mentee.
- X.6** Mentors shall have available up to two (2) hours per month of release time from their regular duties for each mentee assigned to them, in order to work with the new employee(s), to model job expectations, guide, assist, or consult with the new employee during said employee's first year of employment. Mentors shall not receive additional compensation other than that provided in X.7.
- X.7** Each mentor shall receive a stipend of \$100 per mentee for a year of mentoring. The stipend shall be paid upon the submission and approval of the mentoring meeting log described in X.8 to a supervisor designated by the Mentoring Program Coordinator.
- X.8** Each mentor shall keep a mentoring meeting log that records all meetings, including dates and times, with the mentee. The log shall be submitted to the designated supervisor upon the completion of the year of mentoring.
- X.9** The Association shall be promptly notified of all mentor/mentee assignments, and shall be provided twenty (20) minutes of consultation time with the mentee within said new employee's first two (2) weeks of employment.



# WHO SHOULD BE A MENTOR?

At the heart of every mentoring program are the mentors. Mentors should have career experience, but more importantly, they should have a sincere desire to help others.

**An ESP mentor must also be an ESP.** However, this does not necessarily mean someone in the same ESP career family. A mentoring relationship between two ESP in different career families may seem unusual, but it could be the best fit. The participants should be paired based on what they identified as their goals, and areas of need or expertise. While we believe that only ESP should mentor other ESP, we recognize that ESP can benefit from coaching from any of their colleagues, including teachers and administrators.

## EXPERIENCE AND JOB CREDENTIALS

A typical mentor is a veteran professional who takes an active interest in the development of another ESP. The mentor should have at least two years of experience as an ESP and be in good standing with their employer. They should also have met all of the qualifications of his or her ESP career, such as required licenses or certification. Mentors must understand the role, purpose, and process of mentoring and have a network of contacts who can help the mentee achieve his or her goals (*mosaic of assistance*). The mentor should be familiar with national and state laws regarding education, as well as school district/university policy. Mentors should also be familiar with their collective bargaining agreement, if in a statutory state.

Mentors are often active in the local and state affiliate, serving in governance positions such as building representatives, local leaders, or committee members. Retirees form a valuable pool of potential mentors as well. They often have the time and interest, as well as years of institutional knowledge to share.



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Anthony is a general education classroom paraeducator in his first year. Recently the principal asked him to substitute for the classroom teacher because, according to the principal, the teacher was serving on a very important district committee. Anthony is very concerned that this practice will continue and is feeling overwhelmed. Anthony needs to figure out how best to approach the teacher and principal with his concerns. Luckily, Anthony has a mentor who can provide him with support and guidance.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

### An effective mentor...

- ▶ Is patient, even-tempered and consistent.
- ▶ Is a good listener and can also communicate clearly, without sending mixed messages.
- ▶ Is able to give and accept feedback in a constructive manner.
- ▶ Respects individuality and differences in backgrounds, values, and experiences.
- ▶ Can freely praise.
- ▶ Is flexible and has a sense of humor.
- ▶ Can think outside the box and make quick decisions if necessary.
- ▶ Is a model of professionalism.
- ▶ Respects confidentiality and is trustworthy and discreet.
- ▶ Works collectively and collaboratively.
- ▶ Is enthusiastic about his or her own career and the mentoring position.
- ▶ Can acknowledge when the mentoring relationship isn't working and is willing seek help.
- ▶ Is a lifetime learner.

## COMPENSATION

Because they are offering their time and energy to the program, mentors should be compensated in some fashion. Depending on school district/university and Association policies, most programs offer some combination of compensatory time, organizational leave, travel expenses, monetary stipend, or credits to move on a salary scale. The three sample programs you will learn about later in this manual handle compensation differently. It is important when setting up a mentoring program to include compensation for mentors, program administrators, volunteers, and other individuals offering their time to the program.



# WHO SHOULD BE A MENTEE?

A mentee is an ESP who seeks support and guidance in their career. There are various ways mentees are identified. In some programs, any newly hired or transferred ESP will receive a mentor; in others, the mentee will self-refer and request a mentor's help.

## EXPERIENCE AND JOB CREDENTIALS

The typical mentee is a new hire during a probationary period or the first year of employment. However, experienced ESP can benefit from a mentoring program as well. They may be struggling and need help in their current position or there may be new things they want to learn. They may have been transferred to a new district or campus where the culture and procedures are different from those of their old position. There will be differences in mentoring programs for brand-new employees, those who are new to a worksite, or those with years of experience but are struggling in their current position. The type of program best suited for the mentee will be identified by a needs assessment and the identification of goals jointly developed by the mentor and mentee.



### **I NEED A MENTOR!**

Grace is a school attendance officer at a middle school. Grace used to be a paraeducator but switched careers recently. Luckily, she has a mentor to guide and support her in her new career. So when Grace decided to use her knowledge of whole student strategies to improve attendance at her school, she worked with her mentor to figure out how best to approach the administration with her plan.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The list of personal characteristics for mentees is much the same as those for mentors.

### A successful mentee...

- ▶ Is motivated, reliable, and patient.
- ▶ Is an attentive listener and not afraid to ask questions.
- ▶ Is flexible and has a sense of humor.
- ▶ Respects individuality and differences in backgrounds, values, and experiences.
- ▶ Realistically appraises his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Can handle constructive feedback.
- ▶ Can work collectively and collaboratively.
- ▶ Is enthusiastic about his or her career and the process of mentoring.
- ▶ Can acknowledge when the mentoring relationship isn't working, and is willing to ask for help or a change.
- ▶ Is a lifetime learner.

## CONFIDENTIALITY IS KEY

Trust is the cornerstone of mentoring. Both mentors and mentees should be able to speak freely, knowing that any communication between them is strictly confidential. Mentees must be assured that no personal information will be revealed unless required by law. A confidentiality agreement signed by both partners can help clarify when disclosure of privileged information might be legally or ethically necessary. The agreement should also identify any documents that might be retained by the mentoring program, such as mentee application forms or meeting records.



# WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTORS AND MENTEES?

Both parties in a mentoring partnership should sign a letter of understanding at the beginning of their relationship that demonstrates their commitment to the process and agreement on certain ground rules and assumptions about the process. (See sample “Letter of Understanding,” tools section.)

## **MENTORS AGREE TO...**

- ▶ Take the mentoring commitment seriously.
- ▶ Have realistic expectations.
- ▶ Participate in needs assessment with mentee and establish a time frame for accomplishing the identified goals.
- ▶ Recognize time commitment and be willing to follow through on it.
- ▶ Participate in all mutually agreed-upon meetings.
- ▶ Be available on an as-needed basis above and beyond agreement (within reason).
- ▶ Practice confidentiality.
- ▶ Tailor feedback to provide encouragement.
- ▶ Keep a reflection log and review with mentee. (See sample “Reflection Form,” tools section.)
- ▶ Model professionalism—what a good employee should be and do.
- ▶ Attend meetings with other mentors if appropriate.
- ▶ Refrain from reprimanding or recommending disciplinary actions.
- ▶ Recognize that his or her role is not to evaluate the mentee.
- ▶ Be prepared to change or end the mentoring relationship if it isn’t working.
- ▶ Celebrate success and recognize achievement.

## MENTEES AGREE TO...

- ▶ Take the mentoring commitment seriously.
- ▶ Have realistic expectations.
- ▶ Participate in needs assessment with mentor and establish a time frame for accomplishing the identified goals.
- ▶ Recognize time commitment and be willing to follow through on it.
- ▶ Participate in all mutually agreed-upon meetings.
- ▶ Ask for additional assistance if necessary.
- ▶ Practice confidentiality.
- ▶ Accept constructive feedback from the mentor and provide honest feedback to the mentor.
- ▶ Keep a reflection log and review with mentor. (See sample "Reflection Form," tools section.)
- ▶ Be willing to assume responsibility for personal growth and success in the relationship.
- ▶ Be prepared to change or end the mentoring relationship if it isn't working.
- ▶ Celebrate success and recognize achievement.

## ACKNOWLEDGE TIME COMMITMENTS

A mentoring relationship involves a substantial time commitment from both the mentor and mentee. It is essential that participants discuss this up front to make sure there is a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Agreement on the time commitment should be included in the written letter of understanding that is signed by both parties.



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Jennie was a math intervention paraeducator who recently switched over to special education. She's struggled in this new field and questioned whether she made the right decision. Luckily, her school district matched her with a mentor who is an experienced special education paraeducator. Her mentor will observe her in the classroom, recommend areas for improvement, and then help her develop her own professional development plan. With the help of her mentor, Jennie is now confident that she can be successful.



# MENTORING: A PERFECT FIT FOR ADULT LEARNERS

## **Adults learn experientially and approach learning as problem-solving.**

### **We know that...**

- ▶ Adults learn best by doing. They learn through active practice and participation.
- ▶ Adults learn through problem-solving and meaningful engagement.
- ▶ Adults have a life full of experiences that affect their learning.
- ▶ Adults expect learning activities to be relevant to their lives. They will learn only what they feel they need to know.
- ▶ Adults learn effectively only when they have a strong inner motivation to develop a new skill or acquire a particular type of knowledge.
- ▶ Adults learn more when they are free to direct their own learning. They want to be equal partners in their learning.
- ▶ Adults need concrete experiences that can be applied to their everyday lives.
- ▶ Adults need immediate feedback.

Adults have many competing responsibilities that often pose barriers to learning, such as family demands, finances, and time. Mentoring is a successful approach because it is done on the job, has practical and pragmatic benefits, can be incentivized, and addresses scheduling and time.

# THE MENTORING PROCESS

At the beginning of their relationship, mentors and mentees should talk about how they want to structure their partnership. The first meeting should always be a person-to-person meeting. While subsequent meetings can include long distance methods such as phone and e-mail, it is important that the first meeting be face-to-face.

The following outline can help partners develop their mentoring relationship.

## THE FIRST MEETING

**Get to know each other.** Start with what you might have in common. Break the ice by talking about family, hobbies, interests, and personal histories.

**Address the mentee's short- and long-term goals.** If the mentee already has specific goals coming into the program, see that both the mentor and mentee review them together. If the mentee comes into the meeting without specific goals, the mentor can assist him or her with the goal-setting process so that the objectives are clear and achievable. Make sure everyone is on the same page with what they hope to gain from the process and the relationship.

### Setting SMART Goals

To make sure your goals are clear and achievable, each one should be:

**S**pecific – target a specific area for improvement

**M**easurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress

**A**chievable – set objectives that are attainable

**R**ealistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources

**T**ime-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved



**Review the mentor's reasons for volunteering.** Talking about the mentor's career history and experience (identified in the mentor application) can help the mentee feel more comfortable about the process and more confident about achieving his or her goals.

**Agree on a schedule and ground rules.**

- ▶ When should you meet and for how long?
- ▶ What location is most convenient?
- ▶ How can you contact each other?
- ▶ Under what circumstances should meetings be cancelled?
- ▶ Are informal sessions via e-mail or phone possible? Desirable?

**Decide whether and how to use reflection logs or notes from meetings going forward.** For example, should they be shared or kept as personal journals? If shared, should they be filled out together or separately? Should they be reviewed at the beginning or end of each get-together? Or after some other time period? Use the sample reflection forms in this manual to tailor a log that works for both partners.

**Discuss and sign a letter of understanding** that lays out time commitments, goals, and pledges regarding program commitment and general rules of behavior understood by both parties. It should also outline expectations and roles and responsibilities.

**Discuss the parameters of confidentiality and sign a confidentiality pledge.** Each partner should be clear that their discussions are privileged and private information and will not be shared unless legally necessary.

**Discuss any reservations you might have about the mentoring process or relationship.** If either partner has any reservations about the process, now is the time to discuss it. Honesty and frankness are the foundation of healthy mentoring relationships.

## SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

**Be prepared.** Mentees should review their reflection logs or notes from the previous meeting and think about what they would like to focus on at the next meeting. Mentors should set a meeting objective and assemble any supplementary materials in advance of the session. Both partners should evaluate the mentee's progress toward the identified goals.

**Stay focused.** Stay focused on the meeting's goals and objectives. Encourage a free and open exchange of ideas; don't assume that you know what each other is thinking. Minimize interruptions.

**Summarize the meeting and prepare for the next one.** Review the meeting's effectiveness and identify next steps and ideas for follow-up. Confirm and commit to the next session. Depending on what the partners have decided, they should fill out their reflection logs either at the conclusion of each meeting or shortly thereafter. Logs or journals can help both partners identify patterns or challenges and assess progress.



# SETTING UP AN ESP MENTORING PROGRAM

There is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for mentoring programs. What matters most is what will work. Mentoring programs should be developed based on the specific and often unique goals and objectives of the employer and the needs of the mentees. Mentoring programs will differ based on local conditions as well as the level of Association involvement. To overcome any resistance to setting up an ESP mentoring program, it's important to stress how mentoring benefits the entire education community and how it contributes to student success.

## WHAT KIND OF PROGRAM WILL YOU HAVE?

**Each program will have its own identity, depending on a number of factors, including...**

- ▶ Whether the school district/university is supportive, involved, or directly administers the program.
- ▶ The structure of the state and local Association.
- ▶ The composition of the unit.
- ▶ Whether the program is a negotiated contract provision or the result of other policy or informal arrangements with administrators.
- ▶ What kind of relationships ESP have with other employees and administrators.



### **I NEED A MENTOR!**

Lisa is a food service worker and today is her first day on the job. Luckily, the school has paired her with Rene as her mentor. Lisa will shadow Rene for the first week and also rely on her for support for her first year of employment. Rene is there from day one to help Lisa figure out what she needs to do to be successful.

➔ *The following points can jump-start a discussion about how to set up your own mentoring program.*

## ANTICIPATE POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

By identifying the potential difficulties a mentoring program might face, many problems can be avoided from the outset.

**Here are a few things to consider:**

**Resistance:** Head off possible objections by proactively touting the benefits of the program for the entire school/university community, especially for student learning and success.

**Recordkeeping:** The program will need an administrative location: a place to meet (preferably not a staff lounge) with access to a desk and a phone, and somewhere to keep records. Determine which records should be kept and for how long. Be sure to consider what data you need to collect to capture the program's successes or weaknesses. Be sure to keep present and future confidentiality in mind when making decisions about record retention.

**Relationships:** Carefully consider how to match mentors and mentees, and establish procedures for reassigning duties should a pair be incompatible. Most likely this will be the responsibility of the mentoring program committee.

**Responsibilities:** Work on how to delineate the roles and responsibilities of mentor and mentee, keeping in mind that each mentoring relationship is unique.

**Realistic objectives:** Start with realistic goals. If you set your sights too high, it puts undue pressure on both the mentor and the mentee. Also, acknowledge the emotional demands of the program—possible conflicts over objectives or undue demands on time—and discuss them openly from the outset.

**Results:** Try to define in advance what would be considered a successful outcome(s) for the program.



## ESTABLISH A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Gain support for the program by stressing the benefits to the district, the school, the university, the mentors, the mentees, and ultimately, the students.

### Benefits include:

- ▶ Professional development and personal growth for ESP, leading to enhanced student learning, improved employee satisfaction, and increased retention of skilled ESP.
- ▶ Enhanced cooperation and teamwork and increased communication within and across all ESP career families.
- ▶ Furthering the overall mission of the district/university—ensuring student success.



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Shawn is the electrician for his school district. He is a well-respected member of the community, has often informally mentored kids in his schools, and even coordinates a winter clothes drive each year. However, now the school administrators are asking him not to personally interact with students. Shawn is concerned that ultimately students will be confused and hurt by this decision. He needs a mentor to talk to.

## DESIGNATE A MENTORING PROGRAM COMMITTEE

The Mentoring Program Committee is the mentoring planning and supervisory body and the foundation of any effective mentoring program.

### **The committee defines the scope of the program and...**

- ▶ Selects materials and criteria to be used.
- ▶ Analyzes applications.
- ▶ Pairs mentees with appropriate mentors.
- ▶ Keeps records of the progress of each mentoring relationship.
- ▶ Responds to complaints about unsuitable pairings.
- ▶ Keeps track of the program over time.

There is no one standard definition of such a committee—its composition depends upon many factors, such as whether or not the program is a joint employer-Association project and whether it is designed for a wall-to-wall unit or a single ESP career family.

### **A mentoring committee might include:**

- ▶ At least one member from each relevant ESP career family.
- ▶ Executive committee member from the local Association.
- ▶ At least one Association staff person.
- ▶ Representative(s) designated by administrators (Human Resources or Staff Development).

Remember, this is just one model for a possible Mentoring Program Committee. Some mentoring programs will have a mentoring program coordinator, in place of a committee, to coordinate the program. Your design should be created according to the scope and needs of your program.



➔ *It will be easier to gain support for and involvement in your mentoring program if you...*

## DEVELOP A CLEAR WRITTEN STRATEGY

A clear mission statement and strategy is one of the most important factors in determining whether a mentoring program will succeed or fail. The mentoring program committee should engage in detailed discussions of the following points before proceeding.

**Define the basics:** What is a mentoring program for ESP? Why set one up? Who will benefit? How will it work? Develop materials that answer these questions and use them to gain support for the program as well as recruit participants.

### Outline an operational plan that includes...

**Set-up:** What will the planning and supervisory body for the program consist of (an advisory board, program coordinating committee, or program coordinator)?

**Ongoing management:** Who will be responsible for regular program operations, such as reviewing applications, matching mentors and mentees, keeping records?

**Budget:** What sort of expenses should be anticipated (mentor training, promotional materials, stipends)? Where will the money come from?

**Time frame:** When do you hope to have the program in place? How long will it last? What do you hope to accomplish in that period?

**Goals and outcomes:** What are your short- and long-term goals and how will you measure success? Participation data? Analysis of participant feedback?

**Outreach:** Who will be responsible for producing materials that will tell others about the program, addressing the what, why, who and how as well as telling people how the program has been successful and how they can become involved?

## ESSA AND MENTORING

Mentoring as professional development for ESP is addressed in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. In Title VIII, the definition of professional development specifically includes paraeducators. Title-specific professional development references allow for paraeducators and other appropriate staff to receive professional development.\* The flexibility of the law leaves a door open for ESP mentoring, but only assertive advocacy will allow our members to step over the threshold. It is important for ESP to be involved in ESSA implementation strategies, such as development of the local consolidated plan or the school improvement plan. We must also reach out to teachers for support. Our students will benefit if ESP unite with teachers to insist on a holistic education team with mentoring for both.

\*Examples include, but are not limited to Title II Part A Sec.2102 (xv) and (xvi) Child Abuse and Early Childhood; Title II Part A S.2103 (G) (ii) Joint Training Early Childhood; Title III S. 3111 subsection (b) (B) English Learners; Title IV Sec. 4104 (C) (v) Technology; Title VI Sec. 6121 (13) Native American; Title VIII Sec. 8002 (22) (B) Family and Community; and Title IX Sec. 9102 (6) Homeless Youth



### I NEED A MENTOR!

Jessica is a new school bus driver. She tells her mentor that her bus schedule is constantly being changed without explanation. It seems that every time she learns a new route and gets familiar with the students, her route gets changed. She has tried to discuss the issue with her supervisor, who says, "Get over it; it can't be helped." Jessica feels disrespected. She asks her mentor to help her.



➔ *Next you can begin to focus on the specifics, such as...*

## **DEFINE A RECRUITMENT PLAN AND SELECTION PROCESS FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES**

- ▶ Make program known to potential participants.
- ▶ Outline expectations and benefits for both mentors and mentees.
- ▶ Develop an application and screening process and describe it to potential participants.
- ▶ Decide whether to have face-to-face interviews, and if so, who should conduct them. Should the mentoring program committee interview mentors? Should a group of mentors interview potential mentees?
- ▶ Decide who should assess mentee's needs and how to identify the best mentor partner to address those needs.

## **PLAN A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PROSPECTIVE MENTORS**

**Mentor training can include, but is not limited to...**

- ▶ Communication skills, team/relationship building, conflict resolution, and the basics of how to be a good mentor.
- ▶ Discussions on fostering acceptance of differences—ethnic or cultural, language, gender, age, race, etc.
- ▶ Ideas on how to develop a [mosaic of assistance](#).
- ▶ Explanation and training on confidentiality issues.
- ▶ A mentor support group that can answer mentor questions or concerns and to allow for other mentors to share new ideas and strategies with their peers.
- ▶ Other methods of support from the Association or administrators, if offered.

Of course, each mentoring program will design its mentor training according to its own needs and situation.

➔ *Once you've laid the groundwork, the real process of setting up mentor-mentee relationships can begin. Here are some possible next steps and things to keep in mind.*

## MATCH MENTORS WITH MENTEES

Factors to take into account include...

- ▶ mentors' skills and knowledge and mentees' developmental needs and goals
- ▶ logistics such as schedules, worksite locations, possible meeting venues, and so forth
- ▶ relevance of ESP career family in pairing mentor and mentee: Do they need to be from the same ESP career family? Does the mentee need help with skills that only someone in the same ESP career family would be familiar with or are the needs more general?

Matching can be tricky, so contingency plans for when a match doesn't work out should be considered in advance.

➔ *After the mentors and mentees are paired, the program should require preliminary agreements and continue to oversee and monitor their relationship and offer further support, if necessary. For instance:*

## REQUIRE PRELIMINARY AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE PARTNERS

Agreements can include...

- ▶ definition of roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each participant
- ▶ outline of accountability to each other and to the program
- ▶ pledges of confidentiality and program commitment
- ▶ logistics of future meetings
- ▶ how to keep track of progress and future steps (reflection logs or other data collection methods)



## APPRECIATING DIFFERENCES

Whether it's called "cultural competency," "diversity training," or "cultural awareness," the need for cross-cultural understanding is growing as our communities, workplaces, schools, universities, and nation become more diverse.

The following are a few suggestions about how to appreciate the differences among groups of people:

- ▶ Understand the unique strengths and experiences people bring to a group or relationship.
- ▶ Encourage people to share their different perspectives and backgrounds.
- ▶ Facilitate listening and engaging others in dialogue.
- ▶ Remember different learning styles when participating in a group or engaging in a one-on-one relationship.
- ▶ Encourage people to take roles that best suit them.
- ▶ Take advantage of diversity to increase productivity and creativity.
- ▶ Cultivate an appreciation of individuality.



### **I NEED A MENTOR!**

Karen, a high school security guard, is noticing an increase in incidents of bullying at her school. Instead of using increased punitive measures, Karen is interested in how restorative practices might work in creating a safer and more respectful school environment. Her school principal agrees and asks her to put together a plan. Karen is excited at the prospect of making real substantive changes for her students, but now she's nervous and anxious. She asks her mentor for support.

➔ *Once the mentoring program has been in place for some measurable time period, you must address the question of whether it's a worthwhile expenditure of time and effort. To do that, you should...*

## DEVELOP A PROCESS TO TRACK EACH MENTORING RELATIONSHIP AND THE PROGRAM AS A WHOLE

Those who were skeptical at the beginning can be brought onboard if you have data to prove the program's success.

**Determining its value could include the following:**

- ▶ a system for ongoing assessment
- ▶ regular evaluation of program against established objectives
- ▶ a process for addressing obstacles and challenges
- ▶ private and confidential exit interviews with each participant (See sample "Exit Forms," tools section.)
- ▶ clear guidelines for measuring the overall success of the program

➔ *Finally, there are some public relations steps that should be considered after the completion of each cycle...*

## PLAN FOR SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION OF EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE MENTORING PROGRAM

**This could include the following:**

- ▶ regular updates about the program to school employees, the Association, the school board and other members of the school community
- ▶ articles in Association or school district/university newsletter or website
- ▶ special events (guest speakers from the Association, community groups)
- ▶ annual recognition and appreciation event
- ▶ certificate of completion for mentees (See sample "Certificate of Completion," tools section.)
- ▶ thank-you letter for mentors (See sample "Thank-You Letter to Mentor," tools section.)



# THREE MENTORING MODELS

## A LOCAL ASSOCIATION AND SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP, CAÑON CITY, COLORADO

### Developing the program

The Cañon City ESP mentoring program was established in 2004-2005, soon after the Cañon City Education Support Professionals Association (CCESPA) was established. Judy Near, the first CCESPA Local President, approached the school district with the idea of establishing a mentoring program for ESP. The program would be a partnership between CCESPA and Cañon City Schools. The school district agreed and the program was established, enhancing an already strong relationship built on respect and trust between the school district and the local Association.

Since 2004, the Cañon City ESP mentoring program has continued to have the support of the administration.

### What factors convinced Cañon City Schools to build and support the program?

- ▶ the existing strong relationship between CCESPA and Cañon City Schools
- ▶ recognition that mentoring reduces turnover of new employees and enhances the ability of employees to help students succeed
- ▶ recognition that the program would lighten the workload of human resources staff (e.g., mentors would answer common questions asked by new employees and disseminate important information to new employees)
- ▶ recognition that the program would contribute to the mission of the school district

*"This mentoring program is an avenue to success for our new employees. It provides guidance to new employees in district policy and district culture and also alleviates the fear and anxiety associated with taking on a new job. Ultimately, it's a program whose mission is student success."*

–**Cindy Kline**, CCESPA Local President

*"This is one of the most rewarding and important things I have done as a local leader. Everyone wins when ESP are successful, especially the students."*

– **Judy Near**, First CCESPA Local President and NEA-Retired member

## Who are the mentees?

The mentees are all new ESP employees. Each mentee is matched and paired with a mentor selected by the school district for one year. If the school district deems it necessary, the mentoring relationship can be extended beyond that first year. Employees who are struggling are also eligible to participate in the mentoring program.

## Selecting and training mentors

Any ESP is eligible to be a mentor if they have worked in the school district for at least 2 years, are in good standing with the school district, and have completed the mentor training provided by CCESPA.

CCESPA offers the mentor training to all ESP, including non-members. Anyone who would like to be considered for a mentor role in the school district, must first complete this training. The training is provided by CCESPA leadership along with state affiliate staff from the Colorado Education Association. Mentor training typically takes place every two to three years, depending on the demand for additional mentors.

The training is 8 hours and addresses issues such as:

- ▶ what is mentoring and why is it critical for ESP?
- ▶ working with and understanding different personalities
- ▶ communication and leadership skills
- ▶ understanding power vs. authority

## The mentoring relationship

The school district's Director of Human Resources is responsible for matching mentors to mentees. Generally, the district tries to pair mentors and mentees within the same ESP career family, which is especially important for career classifications where state laws, district policies, or procedures regulate a great part of the job and need specific attention.



## **Compensating mentors**

Once an employee has completed the training and is selected as a mentor, he or she will keep track of their mentoring time and activities. When they submit their paperwork to Human Resources, they are given credit that allows them to move up on the salary schedule. Someone who has completed the training but is not selected as a mentor still receives credit for the CCESPA mentor training.

## **Involving retirees**

The Cañon City School district makes a point of involving retired members in its mentoring program. Many of them have long histories of service to the school district and Association that they can share with new employees. They also have time to volunteer, where working ESP might not.

## **Make sure to get mentor program language in writing**

The Cañon City mentoring program is part of CCESPA's collective bargaining agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (see next page). Having a written agreement ensures that the program will be sustained, regardless of whether Administrators and supervisory personnel change.

The Cañon City School District is a small district, with some 3,500 students and is one of the lowest funded school districts in Colorado. If you are interested in more information about Cañon City's mentoring program, e-mail [ESPMentoring@nea.org](mailto:ESPMentoring@nea.org).

## Memorandum of Understanding Classified Mentorship Program *Cañon City, Colorado*

Recognizing the importance of providing new classified employees with a mentor so that their first year with Cañon City School District Fremont Re-1 is a smooth experience, and in order to help set them up for success, the District Administration in cooperation with CCESPA leadership will periodically provide Mentor Training that will be available to any classified employee who has been with the District for at least two years. This training will typically take place every two to three years, depending on the demand for additional mentors.

Once mentors have received the training, they may be selected to serve as a mentor for one or more classified employees. Mentors will be chosen by the Director of Human Resources after consulting with building principals or supervisors regarding the staff in their buildings who need mentors and the staff that are trained as mentors. There is no obligation for a mentor to be required to serve as a mentor, and there is no guarantee that once a person is trained as a mentor that they will be selected as a mentor. Assignments will be made that the administration feels are in the best interests of the new employees hired.

Classified members who are assigned should specifically NOT be evaluators or direct supervisors of the new employee. The intent of the mentorship assignment is to guide, advise, support, provide helpful peer leadership, and be a positive role model to the new employee as they become more familiar and accustomed to the District.

Nothing in this MOU precludes the District from assigning other classified staff members, who have not attended the mentor training, to provide assistance, guidance, or training to new employees in their day-to-day jobs.

Credit/hours earned as part of the mentor training or mentor assignments will be approved based on the most recent stipulations, procedures, rules or policies that govern classified lateral pay movement.

Source: Master Agreement between Cañon City School District and Cañon City Educational Support Professionals Association



# THREE MENTORING MODELS

## ASSOCIATION-LED MENTORING PROGRAM, OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

### Developing the program

The Washington Education Association (WEA) Chinook Peer Support program was developed by the Chinook UniServ Council regional office and serves both ESP and teachers. It was started through a grant from the WEA and has been in operation for nearly 20 years. The program is run by the Executive Board of the Chinook Council. The Association Vice President is in charge of the program and identifies the mentors when they are needed.

### Mentees themselves ask for help

Unlike the Cañon City model, in which all new ESP are assigned a mentor, members in Olympia choose to participate through a self-referral process. After they fill out an application, they are interviewed by a Peer Support Program committee member to select an appropriate mentor. The applicant and mentor determine the best way to proceed based on the needs identified by the applicant.

### Selecting, training, and compensating mentors

The mentors are trusted local leaders who have offered their services, as well as members suggested by those local leaders. The mentors are not officially trained, but the Association meets with them frequently to help them if they are encountering difficulties. The UniServ Council compensates mentors with a stipend at the end of the year. Mentors are also reimbursed for mileage or for the occasional meal or coffee with their mentees. The Council also provides substitute time for the mentor and mentee to visit each other's worksites so they can discuss how the mentee might use some of the mentor's work practices in his or her position.

### Addressing different ESP career families

Chinook tries to match ESP who are in like career situations—paraeducators with paraeducators, for example. The Council doesn't represent all ESP career families, so if someone from a non-represented career asks for help, the program may turn to an outside council.

### Reaching out to the school district

The Chinook UniServ Council represents 49 locals and over 6,000 members, so communication across the district is very important. Each fall the Council sends a letter to every administrator, human resource office, principal, vice principal, and superintendent explaining the mentoring program and inviting them to call if they have questions.

If you are interested in more information about the WEA Chinook Peer Support program, e-mail [ESPMentoring@nea.org](mailto:ESPMentoring@nea.org).

## PARAEDUCATOR MENTORING PROGRAM, THE LEAD PARAEDUCATOR, MINNESOTA

### Developing the program

A union steward was concerned when a persistently high number of disciplinary actions were being taken against new paraeducators in her school district. She understood that the problem was rooted in the need for improved professional development and support. She brought up her concerns with the superintendent and suggested that the district establish a mentoring program for paraeducators.

The superintendent agreed, and the Paraeducator Mentoring program was established. This new mentoring program also included a new position: the lead paraeducator. The lead paraeducator position was originally created as a half-time position, and became full-time, as the program matured and delivered on the expected outcomes.

### The paraeducator mentor network

The network includes a “building mentor” in each of the ten schools in the district. This individual is responsible for mentoring all new or at-risk paraeducators in their building. New paraeducators are mentored for their first year, but the mentoring partnership can be extended if needed. Paraeducators applying for the building mentor position are required to have been a paraeducator in good standing with the school district for at least two years. Building mentors hold their position for three years and must reapply if they wish to serve again. The lead paraeducator is responsible for supporting the building mentors and coordinates training and support for them.

### Offering pre-service and mentor training

In addition to supporting the building mentors, the lead paraeducator is responsible for the ongoing professional development of all of the district’s paraeducators, which includes pre-service training and orientation. It’s during this pre-service training that the building mentors get to meet their mentees for the first time and start establishing the relationships that will sustain them throughout the coming year. When paraeducators are hired mid-year, the building mentors can request a substitute during the mentee’s first day, during which time they work closely with one another.

The lead paraeducator is also responsible for organizing the yearly mentor workshop. He or she has at least three official meetings with the building mentors each year. The lead also tracks the mentor-mentee relationships, and even fills in for the building mentors when needed.



## Responsibilities of the Building Mentors

- ▶ Meet with mentees a minimum of 3-4 times per year and as needed to meet their individual needs.
- ▶ Assist the mentee in transitioning into his/her new position in relation to school policy, classroom expectations and goals, and assistance with technology requirements.
- ▶ Follow up and assist with policy and process items as needed throughout the year.
- ▶ Model a caring and respectful manner when interacting with students and staff.
- ▶ Model behavior that is trustworthy, cooperative, and demonstrates leadership.
- ▶ Model patience and persistence in carrying out educational objectives.
- ▶ Assist with Paraeducator Training Sessions as scheduled.
- ▶ Obtain a minimum of 5 CEUs each year.
- ▶ Attend mentor meetings.
- ▶ Participate in an end-of-the-year evaluation of the program.
- ▶ Distribute specified information to all paraeducators in the building assigned.

## Responsibilities of the Lead Paraeducator

- ▶ Schedule and facilitate (as needed) Paraeducator Training Sessions and Mentor Workshops.
- ▶ Arrange for three building mentor meetings throughout the school district.
- ▶ Act as support to building mentors throughout the program year.
- ▶ Track mentor-mentee relationships throughout the year.
- ▶ Review building mentor timesheets and make recommendations on stipend payouts.
- ▶ Fill in for building mentors on an as-needed, pre-scheduled basis.

## Compensating mentors

The building mentors are paid \$300 to \$700 a year, depending on how many new paraeducator mentees they are responsible for.

## Going beyond mentoring

In addition to administering the mentoring program, the lead paraeducator plays a critical role in the hiring of all new paraeducators in the district. The lead paraeducator screens the applicants for paraeducator positions and attends all paraeducator interviews, ensuring that the right paraeducator is hired for the right position. The lead paraeducator is also responsible for updating and maintaining the district's paraeducator employee handbook, as well as providing feedback on the paraeducator evaluation system. However, the lead paraeducator does not evaluate or manage paraeducators.

## The power of vision and hard work

The driving force behind the establishment of this remarkable program was one visionary union steward who recognized there was a problem and worked with an open-minded Administration to find a solution. Her hard work and perseverance resulted in the framework for mentoring and training for all paraeducators in her district. Her example proves what's possible if ESP believe in their own power and use their voice to make a change.

If you are interested in more information about this paraeducator mentoring program, email [ESPMentoring@nea.org](mailto:ESPMentoring@nea.org).





# The NEA Paraeducator Institute ...a voice for Paraeducators

Elevating paraeducator careers with  
Policy • Resources • Research • Professional Development

Website: [nea.org/pi](http://nea.org/pi)

Email: [pi@nea.org](mailto:pi@nea.org)



**PARAEDUCATOR  
INSTITUTE**

**The NEA Paraeducator Institute** believes that formal mentoring programs for paraeducators early in their careers are critical for professional excellence and the elevation of paraeducator careers. With experienced and veteran mentors at their side, new and struggling paraeducators can start strong in their careers, stay motivated, and establish their own professional communities. Paraeducators who become mentors are leaders and role models and elevate the professionalism of their careers.

### PARAEDUCATOR INSTITUTE WORKGROUP TESTIMONIALS

*"This past year, we held a very successful statewide mentoring and leadership academy for paraeducators. We're now working to continue and expand the academy. It's important work because we have to build our own professional communities and networks if we are ever to get the respect we deserve!"*

–**Sharry Sparks**, Paraeducator, Rye Middle School Rye, NH

*"In the beginning of my career, I had a mentor who supported, guided, and embraced me when I was a teacher's aide. Today, I am a certified paraeducator and an active leader in my Association at the local, state, and national level, in large part because of the encouragement of my mentor. She was always there for me, and 30 years later, I'm still grateful for the impact she had on my life."*

–**Sandie Carner-Shafran**, Paraeducator, F. Donald Myers Education Center Saratoga Springs, NY

*"Paraeducators can benefit as much as teachers from mentoring. We need paraeducators mentoring paraeducators in formal mentoring programs because our students deserve educators who are always striving for their professional best. And that is why, this fall, my local Association will be bargaining to establish a mentoring program for my members."*

–**Jean Fay**, Special Education Paraeducator, Amherst Public Schools Amherst, MA

# NEA'S PROFESSIONAL GROWTH CONTINUUM FOR ESP

The National Education Association supports clear pathways of professional growth for Education Support Professionals (ESP) through professional development and other learning opportunities. These learning opportunities are defined as a Professional Growth Continuum (PGC). Unlike career ladders, which imply only one accepted route to continued learning for everyone, a PGC allows individuals to choose various routes to meet their professional needs and interests.

The PGC consists of universal anchor standards that apply to all nine ESP career families. The universal anchor standards are subsequently categorized into three levels for each career family: Foundational, Proficient, and Advanced/Mastery. Each of the three levels consists of clear and meaningful standards of practice. The PGC serves as a “map” of how ESP can grow professionally; however, professional growth is not meant to be linear or hierarchical. An ESP can be “proficient” for one standard of practice and “advanced” for another standard. The model is designed to be fluid, so that ESP can build professional capacity in one or all three levels by participating in professional development opportunities aligned with the competencies of each standard. The PGC identifies professional development opportunities for professional growth, as well as certifications and/or licenses required for each standard.

## **Mentoring Within the PGC**

Within every standard, across the competencies, and for every ESP career family, the PGC identifies specific opportunities for mentoring. As ESP map their own professional pathways using the PGC, they should consider sharing their knowledge and expertise with ESP colleagues through mentoring. Supporting our own will build a community of professionals and elevate all of the ESP careers.



**PATHWAY OPPORTUNITIES**  
 RM - Role Model  
 M - Mentor  
 L - Leader



# SAMPLE MENTORING PROGRAM TOOLS

The following pages contain sample forms that an Association or school district/university can use in its mentoring program. These forms are designed to be templates; each mentoring program should adapt them to suit their particular program.

- ▶ Mentoring Program Start-Up Notice
- ▶ Mentor Application Checklist
- ▶ \*Mentor Application Form
- ▶ Mentee Application Checklist
- ▶ \*Mentee Form (Application form, if self-referral)
- ▶ Mentee Welcome Letter
- ▶ SMART Goal Setting
- ▶ \*Letter of Understanding (includes pledge of confidentiality)
- ▶ \*Mentor's Pledge of Commitment (can be adapted for the mentee's pledge)
- ▶ \*Meeting Log (can be used to quantify results of the program, especially if it is part of the bargaining agreement, or if mentors are compensated)
- ▶ Reflection Forms for Mentor and Mentee (not intended for viewing by anyone except the mentor and mentee. They can be kept as each partner's personal record if desired. Each mentoring team can decide how best to use their notes—to share them at the beginning or at the end of each meeting, to fill them out together, or to keep them completely private.)
- ▶ \*Mentor Program Monthly Record (can be used to refine elements of the mentoring program)
- ▶ \*Exit Forms for Mentor and Mentee (can be used to evaluate the overall results of the program. Such an analysis might be necessary if the mentoring program is part of the contract.)
- ▶ Mentor Thank-You Letter
- ▶ Certificate of Completion

The forms marked with an asterisk (\*) are those that the mentoring program may consider retaining for recordkeeping and program evaluation.

# MENTORING PROGRAM START-UP NOTICE

Dear [Name]:

The [Name of Association/School District/University] is establishing a mentoring program for Education Support Professionals (ESP).

The following is an overview of the program.

## ESP Mentoring Program Goals

- ▶ Support ESP in the development of personal and professional skills and knowledge from day one and early in their careers.
- ▶ Ensure that the ESP community has a greater voice in the workplace, more opportunities to build their own professional pathways, and increased abilities at assisting students who are striving for success.
- ▶ Retain high quality support professionals.
- ▶ Contribute to the overall mission of closing student achievement gaps.

The role of the mentor is to...

- ▶ Share his/her expertise, skills, and knowledge.
- ▶ Support and encourage the mentee in the pursuit of his/her personal and/or professional goals.
- ▶ Familiarize the mentee with the [school district's/university's] culture, policies, etc.

The role of the mentee is to...

- ▶ Identify and articulate his/her personal and professional goals.
- ▶ Commit to the mentoring process and follow through on it.
- ▶ Accept constructive feedback.

We are accepting applications from ESP who would like to participate in the program as mentors.

Please contact [Name, Position] at [telephone and/or e-mail] for more information or to request application forms.

Sincerely,

[Mentoring Program Committee]



## MENTOR APPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. Cover letter
2. Application
3. Two letters of reference

### **Suggested Questions to be addressed in the Cover Letter**

1. Why do you want to serve as a mentor?
2. What can you offer as a mentor in terms of experience, skills, and knowledge?
3. When would you be available to mentor?

# MENTOR APPLICATION FORM

Name

Date of Application

District/Worksite/University

Position/ESP Career Family

Mailing Address

City

State

Zip Code

Home

Work

Cell

E-mail

## Career History

Position

Years of experience

Position

Years of experience

## Association Experience

Position

Years of experience

Position

Years of experience

How did you hear about the program?

Please attach a cover letter and two letters of reference. At least one reference should be from the Association.



## MENTEE APPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. Cover letter

2. Application

### **Suggested Questions to be addressed in the Cover Letter**

1. What do you hope to gain from the mentoring program?
2. What are your expectations of a mentor, in terms of experience, skills, knowledge?
3. When would you be available for mentoring?

# MENTEE FORM

(Application Form, if self-referral)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Application \_\_\_\_\_

District/Worksite/University \_\_\_\_\_ Position/ESP Career Family \_\_\_\_\_

Check all that apply to your current situation:

- New hire
- New to school/worksite/university
- New responsibilities in current position
- New position/ESP career family
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Please attach a cover letter.**

FOR MENTORING PROGRAM COMMITTEE USE ONLY

Assigned mentor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee representative signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## MENTEE WELCOME LETTER

Welcome,

You have been chosen to participate in the [Name of Association/School District/University] ESP Mentoring Program.

Your mentor is: [Name of Mentor]

[Name of Mentor] has agreed to mentor you and share [his/her] expertise, skills, and knowledge with you. Your mentor will support and encourage you in the pursuit of your personal and professional goals. [He/she] is also tasked with familiarizing you with our [school/school district/university].

You and your mentor will determine where and how often you will meet, following the guidelines of our program.

Mentor's phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor's e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

[Mentoring Program Committee]

# SMART GOAL SETTING

SMART Goal Setting is designed to help you identify if your goal is realistic, measurable and attainable.

**Initial Goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Specific:** Target a specific area for improvement. (What do you want to accomplish? Who needs to be included? Why is this a goal?)

**Measurable:** Quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress. (How can you measure progress and know if you've successfully met your goal?)

**Achievable:** Set objectives that are attainable. (Do you have the skills required to achieve the goal? If not, does your mentor have them and can he/she assist you?)

**Realistic:** State what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources. (Why am I setting this goal now? Is it aligned with overall objectives?)

**Time-related:** Specify when the result(s) can be achieved. (What's the deadline and is it realistic?)

**Review what you have written, and craft a new goal statement based on what the answers to the questions above have revealed.**

**SMART Goal:**



# LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING

The Mentor and Mentee Agree to the following...

1. Time commitment

We will meet (when?)

We will meet (for how long?)

2. Mentee's short-term goal(s)

3. Mentee's long-term goal(s)

4. Confidentiality pledge

We agree that information about our personal or private lives shared in the course of our mentoring partnership shall not be disclosed to any other person, unless required by federal, state, or local laws and regulations. Examples of the types of information that must be disclosed are reports of abuse, threats of suicide, or admission of actions that could be prosecuted as felonies. We further agree that the only documents and/or written records resulting from this process that will be kept in the program's archives are the following: 1. Mentor and Mentee Applications, 2. Meeting logs, 3. Mentor Program Monthly Record, 4. Exit Interviews.

5. Additional pledges:

I will be a good listener.    I will accept and give constructive feedback.    I will be flexible and open

I will commit to this mentoring relationship.

6. No one will be held accountable should the relationship not succeed (hold-harmless provision).

---

Mentor signature

Date

---

Mentee signature

Date

## MENTOR'S PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT

These are my expectations for our mentoring relationship.

As your mentor...

1. I will be available to you.
2. I will help, support, and encourage you in managing and mastering the following:
  - ▶ your career-related goals
  - ▶ interpersonal skills
  - ▶ any other issues you have identified
3. We will work together to solve problems regarding issues that are important to you for the development of your career.
4. We will treat each other with respect, keeping our commitments to each other, for example, appointments, assignments, and agreed-upon expectations.
5. Although I may not have all the answers for you, I will help you frame the questions that will lead you to your own answers or find other sources of assistance.
6. I will share with you and demonstrate what I have learned throughout my career.
7. I will treat everything that transpires in our mentoring relationship with confidentiality, within the reasonable bounds upon which we have agreed.
8. We will learn from and with each other.

---

Mentor signature

Date

---

Mentee signature

Date



# MEETING LOG

Mentor \_\_\_\_\_ Mentee \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Start Time	End Time	Location	Form of Contact	Next Mtg. Date and Time

# MENTOR REFLECTION FORM

Mentor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mentee Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Location \_\_\_\_\_

**Identified Goal(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Observations** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Issues to Be Addressed** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Next Steps** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next Meeting Scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_



## MENTEE REFLECTION FORM

Mentee Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Location \_\_\_\_\_

**Identified Goal(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**How Is It Going?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What Questions Do I Have?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What Does Mentor Suggest?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Next Steps** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next Meeting Scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_

# MENTOR PROGRAM MONTHLY RECORD

Mentor's Name \_\_\_\_\_ District/Worksite \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle month: Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb. Mar. Apr. May June

ESP mentees supported this month:

Name/Position \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Position \_\_\_\_\_

When was support given? (mark all that apply)

- before work
- after work
- break
- lunch
- early/late dismissal
- other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

What support was given? (types of support or information shared) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Were you in contact with the Mentoring Program Committee? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, how were you in contact? (mark all that apply)

\_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_ meeting \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_ other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments, suggestions, questions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# MENTOR EXIT FORM

Mentor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Mentee Name \_\_\_\_\_

Work-site/Location \_\_\_\_\_ Length of time in program \_\_\_\_\_

Completed program? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If no, why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the appropriate answer to the following questions.

**Mentee progressed toward personal and professional goals and objectives.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

**Mentee accepted constructive feedback.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

**Mentoring relationship was successful.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Signature of Mentor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# MENTEE EXIT FORM

Mentee Name \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Work-site/Location \_\_\_\_\_ Length of time in program \_\_\_\_\_

Completed program? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If no, why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the appropriate answer to the following questions.

## Program met my needs/expectations.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

## Mentor encouraged my personal/professional growth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

## Mentoring relationship was successful.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Signature of Mentee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## MENTOR THANK-YOU LETTER

[Date]

[Name of Mentor]

[Address of Mentor]

Dear [Name of Mentor]:

The Mentoring Program Committee thanks you for your participation in the [Name] ESP Mentoring Program.

Dedicated, experienced Education Support Professionals are essential to realizing our commitment to student success. Our efforts to help fellow ESP members improve their professional skills and effectiveness in their careers through mentoring contributes to that goal.

Together we are moving toward recognition of ESP as essential partners in all aspects of our primary mission—closing the student achievement gap.

We hope you will continue to be involved in the ESP Mentoring Program.

Sincerely,

[Mentoring Program Committee]

## CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

# EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL (ESP) MENTORING PROGRAM

This certificate is presented to

**[Name of Mentee]**

for successful completion of the [Name] ESP Mentoring Program

**[Dates]**

[Name and signature of Mentor]

[Name and signature of State Association President or Local President or Mentoring Program Committee Representative]



# RESOURCES

## Websites

[www.nea.org/ESPMentoring](http://www.nea.org/ESPMentoring)

[www.nea.org/ESP](http://www.nea.org/ESP)

<https://newteachercenter.org>

<https://elearningindustry.com/the-adult-learning-theory-andragogy-of-malcolm-knowles>

<http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/rbtfl/nivlR./JY.5Y6/full>

[https://www.lindenwood.edu/education/andragogy/andragogy/2011/Lieb\\_1991.pdf](https://www.lindenwood.edu/education/andragogy/andragogy/2011/Lieb_1991.pdf)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699442>

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/human-resources/learning-development/staff-mentoring-program>

## Articles

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## Books

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Davis, Emily. *Making Mentoring Work*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. Step-by step approach for induction program design for new teachers.

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