A Review of Best Practices

in New Teacher Mentoring

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Purpose

The intent of this document is to concisely capture current best practices for effective mentoring, based on research and tools used by other states, organizations, and consulting companies. The BEST Mentoring Standards Revision Team should use these best practices as guidance for improvements made to the existing standards. While this summary captures much of the current thinking on this topic, it is not an exhaustive list.

What Follows

The following sections provide an annotated bibliography of current best practices in mentorship of new teachers. Each synopsis includes key ideas from the source. A link is included to provide direct access to the source.
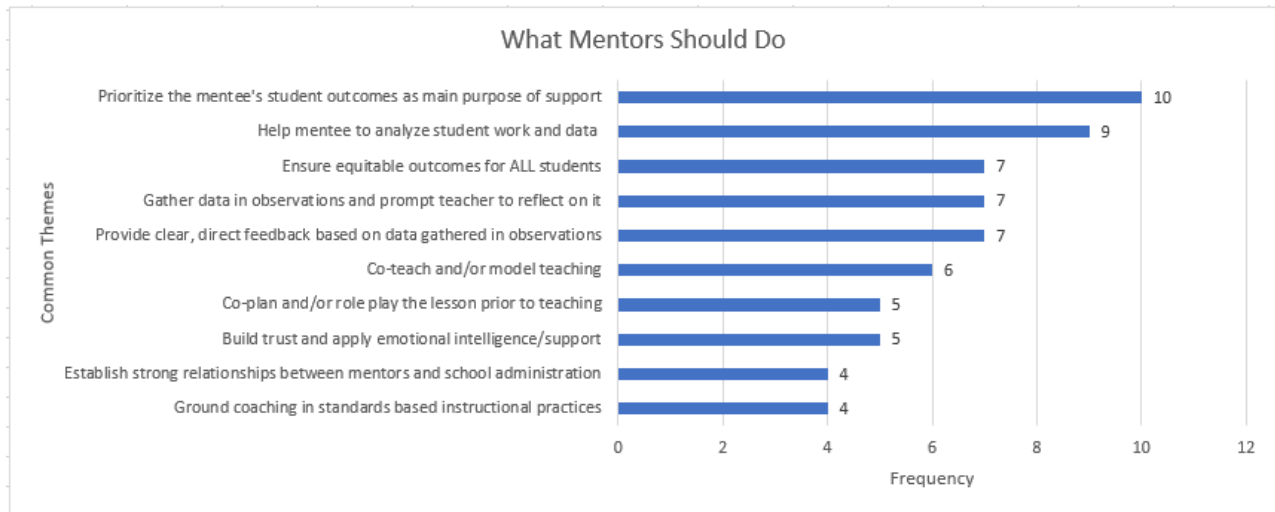
Summary of Best Practices in Mentoring Standards

This document summarizes best practices for new teacher mentoring found in 24 resources, including scholarly articles, state standards, consulting companies and organizations. The following ten techniques are highlighted most frequently across these sources.

Top 10 Most Frequently Mentioned Practices to Support New Teachers

1. Prioritize the mentee's student outcomes as main purpose of support.
2. Help mentee to analyze student work and data.
3. Ensure equitable outcomes for ALL students.
4. Gather data in observations and prompt teacher to reflect on it.
5. Provide clear, direct feedback and/or action steps to the novice teacher based on data gathered in observations.
6. Co-teach and/or model teaching.
7. Co-plan and/or role play the lesson prior to teaching.
8. Build trust and apply emotional intelligence/support.
9. Establish strong relationships between mentors and school administrators.
10. Ground coaching in standards-based instructional practices (e.g., Common Core standards).

To see the frequency that these common themes arise across these sources, please see the chart below.

Note: Themes occurring with a high frequency signify that there is a prevalent national focus on these issues. However, themes that arise less frequently may be just as important, even if they are written about less often.

Articles/Research

Source: "[Wisdom of the elders: Mentors' perspectives on mentoring learning environments for beginning science and mathematics teachers](#)" by Dorit Maor and Andrew McConney

Synopsis: The authors researched the characteristics of the most effective mentorships for beginning science and mathematics teachers. They suggest that mentors must be selected based on excellence in teaching but also need to be able to provide "emotional support and instructional and organizational guidance." Mentors should "share pedagogical knowledge, model teaching practice, and provide helpful feedback." The mentee should take ownership of the agenda, including the challenges and solutions to be addressed through mentoring.

Source: "[Accelerating Teacher Effectiveness: Lessons Learned from Two Decades of New Teacher Induction](#)" by Ellen Moir

Synopsis: This article presents findings from the New Teacher Center regarding the best practices in induction for new teachers. Lessons #2, #3, and #5 are most relevant to mentoring.

- **Lesson #2:** This model encourages consistent, one-on-one mentoring where the mentor "helps the teacher analyze their practice and, using classroom data, offer constructive suggestions for improvement. During individual coaching sessions, mentors help new teachers set professional goals, plan lessons, analyze student work, and reflect on their progress. Mentors may teach a lesson while the new teacher observes."
- **Lesson #3:** Mentor conversations with novice teachers are driven by data and focus on standards-based instructional practice. Mentors and their districts use a set of tools to examine and analyze student and teacher learning data and then use these data sets to determine next steps in pursuit of long-term goals.
- **Lesson #5:** Mentors are encouraged to speak regularly to site administrators to align goals. "They can discuss mentoring strategies and learn how to advance teacher effectiveness and student learning."

Source: "[The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development](#)" by The New Teacher Project

Synopsis: This New Teacher Project's research from August 2015 debunks "the widely held perception among education leaders that we already know how to help teachers improve, and that we could achieve our goal of great teaching in far more classrooms if we just applied what we know more widely. . . . In short, we bombard teachers with help, but most of it is not helpful." Teacher development seems to be "a highly individualized process, one that has been dramatically oversimplified." But other than that, educators can no longer draw clear conclusions about what strategies work best for teacher development. Nonetheless, the article does *not* believe that districts should forego their investment in new teacher development but

instead, districts should reevaluate assumptions about what helps novice teachers grow. The article includes three core suggestions for how districts should move forward:

1. Revisit the definition of what it means to help teachers improve (e.g., "Define 'development' clearly, as observable, measurable progress toward an ambitious standard for teaching and student learning.")
2. Reevaluate current systems for professional development (e.g., "Reallocate funding for particular activities based on their impact.")
3. Redesign how we support teacher development and excellence at scale (e.g., "Reimagine how we train and certify teachers for the job.")

Source: "Making Mentoring Work" by Nina Weisling and Wendy Gardiner (as summarized in the [Marshal Memo 728](#))

Synopsis:

- Maximize co-teaching and intensive support from a veteran teacher. The authors believe that creating lesson plans, gathering data during a lesson, analyzing student work, viewing and discussing a classroom video, on-the-fly conversations about challenges and successes—may under-utilize an experience teacher's potential. They suggest:
    - Co-teaching—The mentor and mentee plan and execute a lesson together. The mentor provides modeling and immediate support and then debriefs with the teacher afterward.
    - Modeling—A new teacher benefits from a skilled, veteran teacher who can model particular strategies with their own students.
    - In-the-Moment Coaching—Real-time suggestions can be effective as long as there is trust and the mentee is aware that this may occur. Examples include using subtle hand signals, whispering tips on the side, or using co-teacher talk to redirect the class.
    - The authors argue that mentors must be flexible and adjust to each unique situation. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

- "**Mentors need to have enough released time to get to know their mentees' students, which improves the quality of advice and support given.**" Principals should treat mentors as part of their instructional cabinet. "When mentor teachers are seen as trusted members of a support team—and not as tattletales, playing 'gotcha' with their mentees—then they can serve effectively as liaisons. On the one hand, they can help new teachers understand and implement school policies; on the other hand, they can help administrators understand and respond to new teachers' needs."

Source: "[Scaffolding Instruction Where It Matters: Teachers' Shift from Deficit Approach to Developmental Model of Learning](#)**"** by Zuraimi Zakaria

Synopsis: Although this paper focuses on teachers' work with students, we can easily draw parallels to the work of mentors with teachers (both in how mentors approach teachers and in how mentors speak with teachers about their students). This paper builds off the premise that it is more effective for teachers to use a developmental model to improve student learning than a deficit approach. A deficit approach to learning often focuses on what students cannot do and how the teacher can "fix-it." There are multiple detrimental impacts of this approach, including creating a learning environment focused only on low-performing students.

In contrast, a developmental model focuses on what a student is ready to learn. Teachers focus on building on a student's existing knowledge. With the developmental model, the teacher uses assessment data and evidence from classwork to identify each student's zone of proximal development (ZPD or the space between what the student can do without help and what the student can do only with help). Then the teacher creates lessons and a long-term trajectory uniquely fit to address each student's ZPD. The developmental model has been shown to support learning of high-performing and low-performing students.

State Standards and Resources

LOUISIANA

Source: "[Access to Full Preparation for Teachers in Rural Communities](#)" published by Louisiana Department of Education

Synopsis: This publication documents the limited access that pre-service and early career teachers in Louisiana have to effective training and education programs, thus restricting their access to real practice in the classroom. This in turn has a "devastating" impact on the schools in rural communities, which often serve some of the lowest income students in the state. "In urban or suburban communities, for example, 13 percent of classes are taught by uncertified or out-of-field teachers, while in less affluent rural communities, 21 percent of classes are taught by uncertified or out-of-field teachers. This means that students in rural parishes are nearly twice as likely to be taught by a teacher who has not passed a subject area examination or did not study the subject being taught." Nonetheless, this publication does mention two effective pre-service and first-year teacher programs that enable rural school systems to build local teaching talent. At Northwestern State University, for example, teaching candidates receive regular and intensive feedback from instructional coaches. Another example is the Public Education & Business Coalition's Boettcher Teacher Residency, a teacher residency program that leverages a co-teaching model.

Source: "[Louisiana is Taking the Lead in Mentoring New Teachers](#)" by Learning Forward

Synopsis: In partnership with Learning Forward, the Louisiana Department of Education has recently adopted a mentorship approach for new teachers, which trains and supports mentors' development with the following goals:

- Establishing strong relationships with mentees.
- Using quantitative data (i.e., student achievement results from summative and formative assessments) and qualitative data (i.e., student work and feedback, classroom observations, peer and supervisor feedback) to diagnose and prioritize mentees' strengths and areas for growth.
- Developing mentee's knowledge and skills in content and content-specific pedagogical techniques, classroom management, and to support self-reflection habits. This includes:

  - Setting short- and long-term goals based on student growth results.
  - Crafting a sequence of coaching supports to help reach these goals.
  - Grounding coaching interactions in student evidence.
  - Tracking mentee progress as it aligns to the short- and long-term goals.

- Evaluating and strengthening mentor content knowledge and content-specific pedagogy

A mentoring cycle has three main components: diagnosing mentee needs, coaching mentees to improve, and measuring progress. Mentors co-teach, observe, share feedback, and co-plan by reviewing student work and data, and crafting lessons to respond to data.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education Mentoring Program Standards (adopted from Learning Forward); Standards for Professional Learning

Synopsis: These standards, which have been adopted by Louisiana, define the characteristics of an effective mentor. The language used in these standards promotes a focus on results for all students. A teacher's effectiveness is tied to student learning outcomes and thus it is a key part of a mentor's job to help a new teacher achieve significant student growth. Mentorship of new teachers "focuses on student learning outcomes [which] has a positive effect on changing educator practice and increasing student achievement." Additionally, the standards emphasize the value of connectivity and building on what a teacher has previously learned. "Any single professional learning activity is more likely to be effective in improving educator performance and student learning if it builds on earlier professional learning and is followed up with later, more advanced work to become a part of a coherent set of opportunities for ongoing professional learning."

NEW YORK

Source: New York State Mentoring Standards

Synopsis: Published in 2011, this document summarizes best practices in new teacher induction but it also names characteristics of effective mentors in Standard 7. In particular, Standard 7e is of relevance due to the way it explicitly calls out student data and student achievement as a core part of the mentorship.

- "7e. The mentor demonstrates the ability to analyze student work and other data to inform practice through data-driven decisions and assists the mentee in using data to develop goals and monitor progress towards achieving goals"

Additionally, these standards emphasize the value of administrators and mentors working together to build an environment where new teachers (and the mentorship program) can thrive.

NORTH CAROLINA

Source: North Carolina Mentor Standards

Synopsis: Published in 2010, this document summarizes best practices for mentors of new teachers. In particular, Standards 2b (Relationships with Families), 2d (Diversity), 3a-b

(Content), and 4a-c (Student Learning) are of relevance to this team's work due to the way they explicitly connect the mentor's work to student growth and equity practices.

OREGON

Source: [Oregon Mentoring Program Standards](#)

Synopsis: This document captures the characteristics of a strong mentoring program at large.

- "Mentoring processes are characterized by collaborative cycles of inquiry that provide for standards-based feedback loops leading to measurable outcomes and practices for the success of all students."
- Standards 8.1-8.3 (Equity, Cultural Competence, and Universal Access)
    - See "[Mentor Support for Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Research](#)" published by the ODE, which addresses the following question:
        - How do teachers reflect on their attitudes and beliefs to ensure they are culturally responsive in their teaching practices?

Source: "[High Level Instructional Practices in Mentoring](#)" published on Oregon's Department of Education website

Synopsis: This site highlights a few "High Leverage Practices" that should be encouraged through mentoring. It also provides examples of mentor/mentee interactions to promote these instructional techniques. These include the following:

1. **Use Explicit Instruction**
   Example of Mentor/Mentee Interaction Types
   - Consulting
   - Collaborating
   - Coaching
2. **Design Instruction Toward Specific Learning Goals**
   Examples of Mentor/Mentee Interactions:
   - Mentor/mentee identify instructional level of students, intervention or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals, and curriculum.
   - Mentor supports mentee to break larger more complex skills into smaller "component parts" to ease the planning process.
   - Mentor supports mentee to sequence skills: plan and teach lesson using process such as simple to complex and building on prior knowledge.
   - Mentor observes mentee teach a lesson and provides feedback to mentee. They reflect upon what went well, what changes could be made for next time, and next steps.
3. **Provide Feedback to Promote Student Learning and Classroom Management**

- Mentor shares feedback with mentee highlighting lesson strengths and areas of focus for planning the next lesson. Mentor grounds positive and constructive feedback in evidence and data. Mentor and mentee discuss and agree on next steps.
- Set up partial or full release time for mentors.

Source: "[Mentor Support for Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Research](#)" published on Oregon's Department of Education website

Synopsis: In 2015, the Oregon Legislature determined that projects/districts receiving funds for mentoring must demonstrate efforts with the following: "(a) increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse educators hired and (b) reflecting the demographics of the students of the school district with the demographics of the educators of the school district."

Organizations and Consulting Companies

BRIGHT MORNING: EVERY CONVERSATION COUNTS

Source: "The Art of Coaching" by Elena Aguilar

Synopsis: Aguilar presents a model for coaching for schools and districts. Although her focus is on the needs of adult learners, her model advocates for an equity-driven, student-centered focus.

Aguilar intentionally explains that coaching should not be treated as a means to fix people or enforce a mandated program.

Aguilar presents three models of coaching to use depending on the situation:

- Directive Coaching—works to change behaviors in the here and now
- Facilitative Coaching—works to develop "ways of being or exploring beliefs" that will, in turn, help behaviors evolve (Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own knowledge and beliefs, since this tends to lead to deeper ownership; thus, the likelihood of long-term change increases.)
- Transformational Coaching—"a process that explores behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being of both individual clients and the coach herself, as well as institutional systemic transformation (It is a two-way street between coach and client.)"

Source: Elena Aguilar's "Bright Morning: Every Conversation Counts" website

Synopsis: Aguilar's website offers many tools; relevant highlights included below.

Observations and Debriefs: Aguilar focuses on how teacher actions connect to student learning. The coaches' role is to help teachers improve student learning outcomes by pinpointing the way their actions impact student behaviors and student work. The coach should then implement three different coaching stances, as fitting, to guide teacher progress.

Example Resources:

- Classroom Observation Tool
- Sample Observation Notes and Data Capture
- Teacher to Student Interactions Tracking Tool and Example
- Coaching Lenses, including the lens of Systemic Oppression and Equity
- Coaching Prompts (question and statement stems)
- Active Listening (stems and tips)

Source: "My Secret Coaching Weapon: Compassion" by Elena Aguilar on her consulting company's website, "Bright Morning: Every Conversation Counts"

Synopsis: Aguilar suggests that compassion (not a specific tool) is the most important component of coaching. Compassion can be developed over time. Aguilar notes that many adults engage with each other with so much urgency that we lose kindness, empathy, and respect. A coach must have compassion for both the teacher and the students simultaneously. When a teacher shares a belief or does something that is disturbing to the coach, compassionate coaches ask themselves, "I wonder what has led this teacher to think this way or to do this? I wonder what is underneath this statement or action?" rather than to focus on frustration and to assume the worst. These questions enable the coach to authentically explore the person's perspective with kindness. Aguilar includes her "Lens of Compassion" which includes strategies to redirect judgment and anger into compassion.

Source: "The Principles of Adult Learning" by Elena Aguilar

Synopsis: Elena Aguilar's coaching work is guided by the following seven principles (captured in her words):

1. Adults must feel safe to learn.
2. Adults come to learning experiences with histories.
3. Adults need to know why they have to learn something.
4. Adults want agency in their learning.
5. Adults need practice to internalize learning.
6. Adults have a problem-centered orientation to learning.
7. Adults want to learn.

Source: "Why Your Coaching Program Is Failing" by Elena Aguilar

Synopsis: In this article in *Education Week*, Elena Aguilar names 5 things that need to be true to make coaching effective:

1. Create a clear and shared definition of what coaching is, what it is not, how coaching works, and what its goals are.
2. Articulate a coaching model, with a clear vision, core values, etc.
3. Train coaches, because "a good teacher does not necessarily make a good coach."
4. Focus on foundational skills like listening and building trust, and "on the dispositions of a transformational coach." Adult learning experts should deliver training.
5. Reflect on and improve culture and climate at the school. "Coaches are not miracle workers, and if the climate at the school is not conducive to learning, if everyone is angry and afraid and shut up in their rooms, then coaches will struggle."

BOSTON PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE

Source: [Boston Plan for Excellence Teaching Academies](#)

Synopsis: BPE runs Teaching Academies to train new teachers. In this program, new teachers are partnered with experienced teachers to implement research-based practices, reflect on their impact on student learning, and adjust instruction until every child is meeting targeted goals. New teachers are guided to use data to improve instruction and intervention. "Curriculum planning begins with looking at data, planning from the data, implementing plans, and analyzing results. This allows teachers to match the right student to the right instruction at the right time." All Boston Teacher Residency trained teachers take a year-long data course which prepares them to use formative, interim, and summative assessment data, and equips them with the important skills and mindset to effectively use data.

MATCH EDUCATION

Source: [Match Education](#)

Synopsis: Match Education is the shared brand name of Match Charter Public School, The Match Foundation, and The Sposato Graduate School of Education. The goal of the Sposato Graduate School is to prepare first-year teachers (and school leaders) to effectively support low-income students. It serves as both a Masters' program and a first-year teacher coaching program. Experienced classroom teachers partner with new teachers to train them in specific pedagogy. Pre-service and first year teachers participate in simulated teaching practice; teachers rehearse a portions of lessons, receive real-time feedback, and immediately try that same part again to improve it. This type of rehearsal cycle may repeat again and again to help students strengthen their teaching practice. Match and the Sposato Graduate School believe that actual rehearsal of teaching techniques helps new teachers get better faster than simply talking about or watching teaching. Instead of receiving feedback every few weeks, pre-service and new teachers receive feedback after every day they teach.

MIRAVIA

Source: [Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships](#)

Synopsis: Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, leaders and authors of learning-focused relationship work, run MiraVia. In their book, *Mentoring Matters,* they note that it is essential to clearly define the mentor-mentee relationship. They seek to "support the initiation, development, and maintenance of a fruitful, learning-focused experience" for mentors and mentees. They address three functions of mentors (providing support, creating cognitive challenge and facilitating professional vision); provide verbal tools to support reflection, planning, and problem solving; and offer a continuum of interaction (calibrating, consulting, collaborating, and coaching) to support the mentor-mentee work.

NEW TEACHER CENTER

Source: New Teacher Center, Instructional Coaching Practice Standards

Synopsis: The language in these standards highlights the NTC's prioritization of coaching for equitable outcomes for all students. Standard 5.1 is a strong example of this. The New Teacher Center also suggests, "Just like student learning, beginning teacher learning should be data-driven and standards-based. To be effective, feedback to beginning teachers must be grounded in evidence about their practice, including information gathered through classroom observations and student work. Use of professional teaching standards, documentation of mentoring conversations, and data collection on various components of classroom practice ensures a solid structure for focusing on continuous instructional growth." The New Teacher Center emphasizes the value of collaboration and communication between mentor and administrators (as well as board members and other valuable community partners); the partnership between mentor and school leader is considered especially important and should center around advancing teacher effectiveness and equitable learning outcomes for all students.

Source: New Teacher Center Courses

Synopsis: The following three courses are summarized below:

Course 1: Mentoring for Equity

A mentor should help teachers examine their classroom practices for inequities and adjust accordingly. To truly measure equal opportunity in a classroom, educators must evaluate whether student outcomes are equitable. There are three domains of equity to consider: Content, pedagogy, and climate.

Course 2: Knowing Students

A mentor should help teachers get to know their students individually in order to provide equitable learning outcomes. Teachers should review student data, grades, and test scores to get to know a student academically. Yet, it is also important that teachers get to know students beyond academics. For example, mentors need to help new teachers learn about students' strengths, interests, culture, race, language, interests, and preferred learning style. This knowledge can help the teacher differentiate instruction to be more responsive to students' needs, and thus promote equitable learning outcomes.

New Teacher Center Resources to Help Teachers Know Their Students on a Deeper Level:

- Knowing Students Across Multiple Dimensions Tool
- Knowing Students Classroom Student Tools

Course 3: Giving Feedback

This course encourages mentors to consider five areas when providing effective feedback:

1. Avoid providing opinions. Instead, provide evidence.
2. Feedback should be provided in a timely manner.
3. When asking questions, use wait time; new teachers need a chance to reflect.
4. Give positive and constructive feedback based on student data
5. Follow up afterwards to see if the feedback was successful in positively impacting students

DIANE SWEENEY

Source: Diane Sweeney Consulting

Synopsis: Sweeney's approach to coaching is student-centered. She advocates for outcomes-based instructional coaching that is treated as a partnership centered around the student goals. She works to help schools and districts to focus on student achievement of the standards instead of just teaching practice and advocates for school leaders and coaches to coordinate support for the teacher with other initiatives in the school.

In her model, coaching begins with a student achievement goal that drives backwards mapping: What do you want students to master and by when? Coaching then focuses on helping teachers support students to get there. This avoids a typical coaching mistake of focusing too much on teacher needs or the coach-teacher relationship and too little on student learning outcomes. Coaching conversations involve looking at sample student work, reflecting on how students are growing and what the teacher can do to push student achievement, a stark contrast to coaching conversations that focus more on the teacher's instructional moves.

Sweeney advocates for coaches and teachers to co-plan and co-teach. At the end of a coaching cycle, the coach and teacher evaluate where students were and where they are now, then reflect on the teacher actions that led to this growth so that the teacher can replicate these techniques again in the future. The belief is that by always beginning with student data, the teachers grow as well. Coaches still coach instructional practice but through the lens of student outcomes.

Sample Resource:

- Coaching Log (captures and guides coaching cycle that focuses on student outcomes)
- Results Based Coaching Tool (tool for coaches during the coaching cycle, to keep the focus on student outcomes)

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