Mentoring

Reason/ Purpose:

Administrators enter leadership positions with content knowledge from their experience and educational training, but are often unprepared to meet the overwhelming responsibilities when they assume a position as a principal or assistant principal. The complexities of the administrator’s role can become daunting and result in administrators returning to the classroom or leaving the profession. Mentoring provides a vehicle for achieving one’s Individual Leadership Plan (ILP), meeting the goals of the Multidimensional Administrator’s Performance Appraisal (MAPA), increasing student learning and fostering sustainability within the organization. The administrator’s continuous learning and growth in the art of the principalship is best facilitated by the support and guidance of experienced colleagues. Mentoring, if done properly, will assist administrators in becoming effective instructional leaders and minimize feelings of isolation.

Definitions:

A mentor is an experienced expert who partners with an administrator to assist and support the individual in developing leadership skills in a collegial and safe environment. Mentoring refers to the process in which a knowledgeable person willingly guides and advises the other administrator.

The terms coaching and mentoring are often used interchangeably. A mentor is an experienced, successful, knowledgeable advisor whereas a coach does not need to be an experienced expert, but can be a peer or colleague and have a more informal tone. Mentoring encompasses coaching techniques, but coaching alone is not mentoring.

Characteristics of Effective Mentors:

A mentor needs to be willing to assist others and must possess the necessary knowledge and skills in educational leadership. In addition to knowledge, Carl J. Weingartner (2009) has identified concepts that contribute to successful mentoring. These attributes are identified below.

Mentors:

- are committed to the process of mentoring
- are effective listeners
- possess sound communication skills
- have developed strong problem solving skills and sound judgment
- often are visionaries
- are creative problem solvers
- maintain confidentiality
- are flexible in thinking and action
- are willing to share knowledge
are experienced principals
know how to ask thought provoking questions
are good (effective) time managers
are risk takers
are aware of community needs and expectations
are proud of their roles as principals
are able to support as well as lead
are able to “back off” when necessary
encourage mentees
maintain a low profile when working with mentees
keep their own egos in check
have a positive outlook toward their role as a principal and mentor
commit the time needed to effectively support their mentees
are willing to validate and celebrate mentees’ successes
make a difference

Process/How/Training:

DoDEA plans to establish a formal mentoring program for educational leaders. A formal program implementation will include: announcing the program; identification of potential mentors; determination of training; training; program protocol that includes mentoring procedures and guidelines, selection of mentees and assignment of mentor to mentee.

In addition to the MAPA, intersecting points for peer mentoring include programs within the newly initiated DoDEA Center for School Leadership. Components within the Center for School Leadership include the Leadership Academy, Principal Induction Program and the Assistant Principal Induction Program.

Experienced and exemplary principals must be willing to mentor new administrators or others in need of assistance in improving skills. It is imperative that the mentor develop a rapport that fosters a learning relationship with the mentee. Most mentee/mentor relationships are for at least a one year period in which the mentee and mentor establish a shared responsibility for learning.

Tips/Advice for Administrators:

- Monitor teaching and provide specific feedback
- Participate in professional growth opportunities
- Subscribe to professional organizations and professional journals
- Know and use the Community Strategic Plan to guide your work
- Know and use the curriculum standards
- Be a leader in developing your Continuous School Improvement goals and interventions
- Use and keep data from a variety of sources for at least a three year period on student achievement at your school
• Delegate appropriately
• Network with colleagues
• Communicate, communicate, communicate
• Document, document, document
• Develop professional relationships
• Develop a time management strategy
• Study the DoDEA Administrator’s Guide
• Study the Negotiated Agreement and Memorandums of Understanding
• Involve others in decision-making and professional growth
• Meet suspenses
• Admit when you are wrong and ask for assistance when needed
• Study your staffing authorization document and always check the Manpower Management System
• Develop teaching schedules that maximize student learning
• Master supply and budget procedures
• Know special education regulations and monitor for compliance
• Encourage and acknowledge excellence publicly and through written notes
• Be visible in your school and community
• Know your facility
• Develop and know your crisis, safety and antiterrorist force protection plan

Resources:

