Welcome to the first issue of *Mentoring in the 21st Century®*! We are excited that you are joining us in the incredibly exciting and important work of ensuring that there is a fully-qualified and fully satisfied teacher in every classroom. This month’s newsletter provides an overview of the challenges and concerns new teachers face and some brief suggestions to guide mentoring practice in those areas.

**Challenges and Concerns of New Teachers**

The eight areas of potential challenges and concerns of new teachers are
- Personal
- Professional
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Relationships with Students and Focus on Student Learning
- Organizational Systems for the Teacher, the Classroom, and Students
- School/District Policies and Procedures
- Collegial Interactions
- Parents and Community

**Personal**

As we know from Maslow’s Hierarchy it is all but impossible to concentrate on the needs of others when we are struggling with our own personal needs. Both novice teachers and experienced teachers new to a district, school, or assignment have to find their place in the social structure of the school and the community. Their need to find appropriate housing, establish personal relationships, and locate a gym or other recreational facilities can occupy much of their time and emotional energy. In the interest of having fully satisfied teachers who feel supported as human beings, mentors need to be appropriately helpful with both information and introductions. This sets the new educators up to concentrate on the work they were hired to do.

**Professional**

The second challenge is one that novice teachers may not even know is an area of concern. If the new educators are twenty-somethings who have just completed an undergraduate program, they may never have had the need to think about medical benefits, investment programs, or saving receipts for taxes. Chances are good that they do not know which documents, hard copy or electronic, they should keep in well-organized folders. Such papers might include job offer letters, contracts, transcripts, permanent certification requirements, professional development expectations, certificates for recertification points, etc. While human resources departments usually provide an overview of these professional responsibilities, most new teachers’ heads are in the classroom they soon will be working in; in fact, they are most likely thinking about the bulletin boards. Those who are listening quickly get a “deer in the headlights” look in their eyes! Mentors can assist by identifying the essential
information that the new educators need to organize early in the school year and help their protégées set up appropriate files. Another professional issue that mentors should address early on is the teacher performance evaluation system. We can help the new educators not only understand how the system works but what the criteria looks and sounds like in the classroom and throughout the professional community.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

While we want to ensure that new teachers feel supported as individuals that is not the whole picture of mentor responsibilities. Our main area of focus has to be on student learning and mentoring work around curriculum, instruction, and assessment has to be at the forefront of mentoring efforts. In most districts, gone are the days when new teachers did not know what to teach and wallowed in choices that resulted in “hobby teaching.” That scenario has been replaced by lengthy documents which identify the standards of learning to be addressed, pacing guides, common assessments, and rubrics as well as information on standardized testing. Most of our mentoring time and energy should be focused on helping our protégées plan and implement instruction and assessment that addresses the curriculum and promotes student learning. This work ensures that there is a fully qualified teacher in every classroom.

Relationships with Students and Focus on Student Learning

Building respectful relationships with students is a challenge for all teachers and especially for teachers new to the profession. The most important piece of advice we can give new teachers is that the best management program is a strong instructional program. Given that our goal is not well-managed students but rather well-educated students we need to coach new teachers in the creation of a learning-centered environment where all students feel a part of the learning community. Many novice teachers spend inordinate amounts of time creating and monitoring deficit-model behavior programs in which students find their names on the board or their marker moved from green to yellow when they do not meet teacher behavioral expectations. We need to help our protégées understand that, rather than focusing on control and compliance, their time and energy is best spent designing active, engaging, and interesting lessons.

Organizational Systems for the Teacher, the Classroom, and the Students

An important mentor responsibility is helping new teachers identify what procedures are needed, which ones are working, which ones are not working and why not, and then help them design alternative systems. In the recent past, novice teachers were focused on organizing their own learning; now they have to organize space, materials, and time for five to fifty others. This is a daunting task. It is easy for them to get discouraged and even blame the students for the chaos that may occur. One shortcoming of the student teaching process is that student teachers are usually assigned to teachers and classrooms where all the systems are operating smoothly with no apparent effort; supervising teachers may not even think to explain what work had been done to set up these systems. Mentors may want to take protégées who are struggling with organization on a “learning walk” through smoothly functioning classrooms and have a coaching session about what the new teacher could try.

School and School District Policies and Procedures

Policies regarding grading and reporting, fire drills, parking permits, leave policies, etc. can be mind-boggling to even the most experienced veteran. The professional new to the district can drown in the details and not be able to discern which are essential and which are nice to know, but not show-stoppers. Mentors can provide “just in time” guidance and support as particular events and due dates approach.

Collegial Interactions

New educators can either be overwhelmed by too many offers of help or by a feeling of isolation and neglect. Mentors play an important role in helping teachers new to the district identify and access all the support staff available at the building and district level. Additionally, we need to be sure that new staff members know who the “untitled” but incredibly knowledgeable experts are on various aspects of teaching and learning and who among their colleagues is more than willing to lend a helping hand. Another responsibility of mentors is to keep
the principal and all the other members of the staff informed as to what is happening in the mentoring program and how they can and should play an important role in the induction of new staff members.

**Parents and Community**

This can be an extremely challenging area of concern for some novice teachers. One of the most challenging events of the year is Back-to-School Night when novice teachers have to explain what the children will be learning throughout the year when they, in fact, are not sure what they are doing the next day. Mentors can play an important role in helping these new teachers prepare for that event and parent conferences by role-playing and even sitting in on difficult conferences. Additional problems can surface when some parents appear to be either over involved in their child’s educational program or seemingly uninterested or unable to be supportive of the learning of their children. Mentors can help their protégées be positive, proactive, and if problems surface, problem solve with them. It is most important that mentors help new teachers see parents not as the enemy but as partners in their children’s education.

To assist you in addressing the eight areas of challenge and concern mentioned above, see the attachment at the end of this newsletter titled Needs Assessment for New Teachers (PDF) which is reprinted from *The 21st Century Mentor's Handbook*. It is organized by the eight categories described in this column and can be used multiple times throughout the induction process. New educators indicate on the needs assessment which areas are of high concern and which are of low concern at the present time. This data can help you maximize your mentoring time and energy.

© 2006 Just ASK Publications & Professional Development.

Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution of this newsletter for non-commercial use only. Please include the following citation on all copies:
New Teacher Needs Assessment

Please rate each item below to indicate your level of concern about or interest in that topic at this time.

Possible Ratings
• 1 for a low level of concern or interest at this time
• 2 for a moderate level of concern or interest at this time
• 3 for a high level of concern or interest at this time

Personal
___ Making living arrangements
___ Locating gyms and recreational facilities
___ Getting to know people

Professional/Human Resources
___ Payroll, benefits, and investment information
___ Certification and tenure requirements
___ Teacher performance evaluation system
___ Professional development opportunities
___ Professional organizations

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
___ District and state learning standards
___ Planning for instruction using the SBE planning process
___ Building a repertoire of instructional strategies
___ Differentiation of instruction
___ Assessing student learning (formative and summative)
___ Using student work and achievement data to inform instruction
___ Going from rubrics to grades

Organizational Systems for the Classroom
___ Setting up the classroom
___ Classroom organizational systems
___ Organizing my time and work

Getting to Know and Working with Students
___ Getting to know the students
___ Creating a learning community
___ Working with students to establish norms and rules
___ Diagnosing student needs
___ Teaching diverse learners
___ Motivating students
___ Assisting students with special needs
New Teacher Needs Assessment

Collegial Interactions and Collaboration

- Establishing a professional relationship with the administrative staff
- Working as a member of a grade level, interdisciplinary, or departmental team
- Working with my mentor
- Co-teaching and collaboration between general and special education teachers
- Working with a paraprofessional

School and School System Policies and Procedures

- Understanding my legal rights and responsibilities as a teacher
- School and district policy handbooks
- Completing administrative paperwork
- Administration of standardized achievement tests
- Obtaining instructional resources and material
- Ordering materials and supplies
- Use of district and school library, media, and technology resources

Parents and Community

- Establishing positive home contact
- Working with parents as partners
- Working with parents of special needs students
- Back-to-School Night
- Parent conferences
- Grading and reporting student learning