

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 28, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: L. Thomson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Teacher Mentorship Program

ORIGINATOR: T. Parker, Executive Director

RESOURCE
STAFF: June Mielnichuk, Adrienne Coull, Mark Ramsankar, Colleen Mondor,

INFORMATION

Background

The Edmonton Public Schools/Edmonton Public Teacher's Local Mentorship Program is a collaborative initiative which was established in 1998 to provide support for new and beginning teachers. It is guided by a committee which is identified in Appendix 1. This report highlights the design and successes of this program.

The goals of the mentorship program are:

- to enhance student achievement through improved teaching practice
- to facilitate collaborative learning and reflective practice
- to build teacher confidence and commitment to the profession
- to promote personal and professional well-being
- to enhance the attraction and retention of new teachers

To date, 955 district teachers have participated in the program. 464 experienced teachers have served as mentors, providing ongoing support and assistance to 491 teachers new to the profession, to the district, or to a teaching assignment. The program has had representation from schools across the district at all four division levels. Over the nine years this program has been in operation, a range of 24 to 100 teachers have participated per year with an average of 55 teachers per year.

Program Model

Since its inception, this program has been provided at no cost to schools to ensure equitable access to the program regardless of school assignment. The program is funded by an allocation from Central Services, with some support for release time costs from the Professional Development Committee of the Edmonton Public Local.

The program provides an opportunity for new and experienced teachers to work collaboratively in a non-evaluative context. Participants have an opportunity to explore new strategies and refine their practices through guided observation and reflective planning,

Mentors who apply for the program have five or more years of successful teaching and require a recommendation from their principal. Beginning teacher protégés who apply are new to the district,

to a school, or to a teaching assignment. Partners are matched on the basis of similarity in teaching assignment.

Mentors clarify district priorities and policies, build understanding of the AISI initiatives, and assist in the development of professional growth plans. Teacher protégés are encouraged to identify their own needs in areas of classroom organization, curriculum expectations, instruction and assessment strategies, time management, planning strategies and other classroom issues that arise. Mentors and protégés communicate on a regular basis.

For the past six years, a Web-based survey of all participants has been conducted. Survey results indicate the following benefits for new teachers:

- orientation to the district and the school
- increased confidence and proficiency
- decreased isolation
- opportunities for reflection, self-assessment and collaborative planning
- affirmation of career choice

Mentors who have participated in the program report the following benefits:

- extension of leadership skills
- opportunity to articulate and model best practices
- reduced isolation
- exposure to new ideas and alternatives
- opportunity to give back to the profession
- renewed enthusiasm for teaching

Principals who have had teachers involved report the following benefits:

- shared responsibility for support of new teachers
- increased instructional continuity and effectiveness
- promotion of teamwork and collaboration within the school
- promotion of continuous professional growth

Comments of individual participants are provided in Appendix II.

All participants are invited to attend an orientation session, joint planning session and an end-of year celebration. Mentors and protégés may each access two days of release time to facilitate classroom inter-visitation and collaborative planning. New mentors receive four half days of training in assessing stages of development, observation and feedback techniques, and cognitive coaching processes.

Future Plans and Recommendations

The Steering Committee has recently met and reviewed the status of the program. The following benefits of the program have been identified:

- provision of leadership in teaching and learning
- support to young teachers and veteran teachers new to a program or teaching assignment
- provision of Professional Development opportunities for mentor teachers to extend their professional practice
- increased awareness and appreciation for the ATA and its contributions to developing professionalism and encouraging young teachers to become professionally engaged

A graduate level course for Mentor teachers participating in our program has recently been approved by the University of Alberta. Discussions are underway to have this course considered for tuition support under the clause 23 Professional Improvement Program.

The committee recognizes that the mentorship program is only one of many resources provided by the district and the ATA to support new teachers during their induction to the profession. The Beginning and New Teachers Institutes offered by Consulting Services, the Provincial ATA Beginning Teachers Conference, and Provincial Specialist councils all play a role in supporting new teachers. Accordingly, an expanded joint committee will be established to combine aspects of the Mentorship Program and the New Teacher Institute, and to formulate a plan for a comprehensive induction program. Potential partners and representatives may include representatives from the following:

- Mentorship Program
- Beginning and New Teacher Services
- University of Alberta
- ATA Local
- Consulting Services
- Personnel Services
- Provincial ATA (Reps from appropriate Specialist Councils or PD)

A survey of Canadian urban school districts is underway to determine the status of programs and services available to their new and beginning teachers. Results will be analyzed by the committee and considered in future planning.

By focusing on the realignment of resources and services within the district and the ATA (Local and Provincial), it is believed that a new structure can be developed which will coordinate services for new and beginning teachers. Through a combined effort an exemplary induction program can be developed which will enhance our district's reputation of excellence.

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APPENDIX I – Joint Steering Committee
APPENDIX II – Web Survey – Sample Responses

JOINT STEERING COMMITTEE

The committee was created as part of the Frame of Reference for the district's Mentorship Program and is a joint venture with the Edmonton Public Teachers' Local. Members of the committee include:

Jeanne Carter, Principal – Crawford Plains School
Adrienne Coull, Mentorship Program Coordinator
Susen Fischer, Teacher – Aldergrove School
Rayanne Iverson, Teacher – Grace Martin School
Stephen Leppard, Vice Principal – Hardisty School
Colleen Mondor, Acting Supervisor – Consulting Services
Mark Ramsankar, President – Edmonton Public Teachers' Local #37
Jan Witwicky, Project Coordinator

Web Survey - Sample Responses

- “This program definitely promotes well-being, especially for those new teachers who might get overwhelmed without support. This also helps new teachers get through tougher years, retaining some who might no otherwise stay in the profession. It also allows for leadership opportunities for teachers who have been in the profession for a while and allows them to share their expertise.”
(comment from a principal)
- “I am a teacher new to this school, but I have been teaching for 4 years now. The mentorship program was almost more useful to me at this point in my career than it was when I was a brand new teacher.”
(comment from a protégé new to an assignment)
- “I have been a mentor and found it rewarding and satisfying to be able to help a new teacher. Articulating my beliefs and practices allowed me to reflect on my work and continue to improve.”
(comment from a mentor)
- “I have always been committed to the profession in terms of working with those who are beginning their career, so participating in this program is a part of who I am as a teacher. My principal thought this experience would be important in the process of ILT work in my school. I feel that leadership requires one to be a mentor, so these were skills I needed to hone. It was just as important to me to learn from my protégé who has given me great hope for the future of the profession. If young people like her are bringing that enormous talent and heart, I am very hopeful.”
(comment from an experienced mentor)