



***Guidelines for  
Mentor Teacher Programs  
for Beginning and  
Experienced Teachers***

*Guidelines Developed in Response  
to the Education Accountability and  
Quality Enhancement Act of 1999  
(HB 2710 and SB 1145)*

***Approved by the Board of Education  
June 22, 2000***

*Division of Teacher Education and Licensure  
Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2120  
Richmond, VA 23218-2120*

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## Acknowledgements

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The 1999 Virginia General Assembly enacted the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act (HB 2710 and SB 1145) aimed at supporting educator productivity and accountability. The elements of the legislation include the evaluation and training of teachers, assistant principals, principals, central office personnel, and superintendents; salary supplements for teachers receiving National Board Certification; and the mentoring of new teachers and those experiencing difficulties as part of the training continuum for all teachers. The legislation amended the Code of Virginia §22.1-305.1. Mentor Teacher Programs as follows:

The Board of Education shall establish, from such funds as may be appropriated by the General Assembly, mentor teacher programs utilizing specially trained public school teachers as mentors to provide assistance and professional support to teachers entering the profession and to improve the performance of experienced teachers who are not performing at an acceptable level. The Board shall issue guidelines for such mentor teacher programs and shall set criteria for beginning and experienced teacher participation, including self-referral, and the qualifications and training of mentor teachers. Such guidelines shall provide that the mentor programs be administered by local school boards, with the assistance of an advisory committee made up of teachers and administrators, and that mentors (i) be classroom teachers who have achieved continuing contract status and who work in the same building as the teachers they are assisting or be instructional personnel who are assigned solely as mentors; (ii) be assigned a limited number of teachers at any time; however, instructional personnel who are not assigned solely as mentors should not be assigned to more than four teachers at any time; and (iii) guide teachers in the program through demonstrations, observations, and consultations to promote instructional excellence. Local school boards shall strive to provide adequate release time for mentor teachers during the contract day.

# Background

Since 1985, a variety of programs have been implemented throughout Virginia to support beginning teachers.

## 1985 -1991

The Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP), initiated in 1985 as the first support program for beginning teachers, evolved into a performance assessment required for licensure. BTAP was rescinded by the General Assembly in 1991.

## 1985

The Colleague Teacher Project for Chesterfield and Fairfax Counties piloted the concept of the colleague or mentor teacher.

## 1987

The Virginia General Assembly passed House Bill No. 1085 that established guidelines for the training of cooperating teachers in the supervision of student teachers. The bill also proposed that cooperating teachers be designated as “clinical faculty,” and be granted special status by colleges or universities.

## 1988

The General Assembly allocated funds to the State Council on Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to implement and evaluate clinical faculty programs that operated over a three-year period.

## 1991

The Department of Education commissioned a qualitative field study of the three-year, clinical faculty projects. The ensuing report suggested that “clinical faculty training is similar to preparation for mentor teachers. It would be cost-effective to combine the two programs giving classroom teachers an opportunity to assist either new teachers or student teachers.”

## 1989 and 1991

Two mentor teacher institutes were conducted.

## 1996

The 1996 session of the General Assembly appropriated \$300,000 for 1996 - 1998, \$150,000 for each year of the biennium; 31 school divisions established mentor teacher programs that supported more than 2,000 new teachers during the two-year period.

## 1997

The General Assembly appropriated \$75,000 for the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) to request proposals from “Clinical Faculty Partnerships” between institutions of higher education and local school divisions. Awards were issued to the Mid-Valley Consortium for Teacher Education and the Regional Clinical Faculty Program in northern Virginia.

## 1998

The General Assembly appropriated \$1.2 million for the 1998-2000 biennium for Clinical Faculty and Mentor Teacher Programs, \$500,000 the first year and \$700,000 the second year of the biennium; twenty partnerships between local school divisions and institutions of higher education were funded.

House Joint Resolution (HJR) 117 was enacted requesting the Department of Education to study the feasibility of implementing a statewide, one-year induction program as the first year of teaching following the completion of a teacher education program. A study issued in response to HJR 117 stated that, if appropriately funded, a year-long induction program for new teachers was feasible.

## 1999

The Virginia General Assembly appropriated an additional \$300,000 for mentor teacher programs. The Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 was enacted requiring a mentor for every beginning teacher. A Mentor Teacher Task Force was appointed by the

Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop guidelines for the implementation of mentor programs on a statewide basis. The Report of the Task Force on the Establishment of a Statewide Mentor Teacher Program was presented to the Board of Education on November 18, 1999.

2000

Following the adoption of the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act requiring a mentor for every beginning teacher, the Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed a Mentor Teacher Task Force to develop guidelines for the implementation of mentor programs on a statewide basis. The Report of the Task Force on the Establishment of a Statewide Mentor Teacher Program was presented to the Board of Education on November 18, 1999. The report outlined essential components of a mentor program and recommended increased funding for statewide implementation. The General Assembly allocated a total of \$2,750,000 for mentor teacher and clinical faculty programs for the 2000-2002 biennium.

## Mission of Mentor Programs

The reality of work in a public school classroom - applying theoretical knowledge, developing effective instructional strategies, meeting individual student's needs, incorporating changing curriculum frameworks, developing high stakes assessment, integrating emerging technology, and remaining sensitive to societal issues - may be one of the most challenging transitions faced by teachers in their entire professional careers.

Mentor programs help beginning teachers make a successful transition into teaching by relying on the expertise of veterans to provide a clinical, real-world training process. Districts that provide effective support attract the most capable candidates, who remain on the job and improve student performance.

New teachers who are mentored receive higher ratings from their principals, develop better planning skills, handle discipline problems more effectively, conduct more productive classroom discussion, and remain in classrooms longer than

teachers who are simply left to “sink or swim.” Veteran teachers who serve as mentors report increased professional revitalization, less isolation, greater recognition, and a belief that they impact the profession more than teachers who are not involved in mentoring new professionals.

## Characteristics of Mentor Programs

Successful mentor programs begin at the local level. Effective programs are characterized by strong leadership and management. The benefits of mentor programs show a direct correlation to their intensity, i.e., the more programs provide, the greater their success. Programs that are not well-planned and delivered can be counterproductive — half-way measures result in increased stress for beginning teachers and a regression to less effective teaching habits.

Higher standards and greater accountability are increasing the demand for qualified teachers. The National Center for Education Statistics predicts that approximately 2.12 million teachers will be needed by 2008. Although many factors are contributing to the shortage — increased birth and immigration rates, an aging teacher force, reduced class size — the most troubling factor is that both novice and veteran teachers are leaving the profession or never enter the classroom. Nationally, 9.3% of public school teachers leave before they complete their first year and nearly 30% leave the profession within five years of entry. Rural and high poverty districts experience even higher rates of attrition. Often the first to leave are the most academically talented.

Losing a well-educated and talented teacher in the first year of teaching is a tragic loss. Losing a talented teacher because of inadequate support and guidance during the early years is a tragic loss that can be avoided.

# Guidelines for the Development of Mentor Programs

These guidelines were developed in response to the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 (HB 2710 and SB 1145) and also reflect the work of the Superintendent's Task Force on Mentor Teacher Programs. They are intended to provide guidance to school boards in the meeting the following responsibilities:

Establish program objectives;  
Manage the local mentor program;  
Develop the program design;  
Develop mentor selection criteria;  
Establish school administrator responsibilities;  
Develop mentor training; and  
Evaluate the effectiveness of the mentor program.

## I. Program Objectives

The Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 requires all local school boards to provide probationary teachers, except those who have prior successful teacher experience (as determined by the local school board), a mentor teacher. Local mentor programs should reflect state initiatives and should encompass, but may not necessarily be limited to, the following objectives:

- ◆ Retaining quality teachers;
- ◆ Improving beginning teachers' skills and performance;
- ◆ Supporting teacher morale, communications, and collegiality;
- ◆ Building a sense of professionalism, positive attitude;
- ◆ Facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching;
- ◆ Putting theory into practice;
- ◆ Preventing teacher isolation; and
- ◆ Building self-reflection.

## II. Program Management

The Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 requires mentor programs to be administered by local school boards with the assistance of an advisory committee made up of teachers and administrators. The specific composition of the advisory committee shall be determined locally but should also include representatives from colleges and universities where clinical faculty/mentor teacher partnerships have been developed.

The specific responsibilities of the mentor advisory committee should encompass, but are not limited to, the following:

- ❖ A commitment to beginning teacher support and assessment;
- ❖ The management and delivery of support and assessment services to beginning teachers;
- ❖ The development of a clearly stated purpose that is grounded in research, supports the Standards of Learning (SOL), and includes the appropriate use of technology;
- ❖ The development of beginning teacher participation requirements and expectations as a condition of employment;
- ❖ The possession of authority over the details of program design and implementation;
- ❖ The delineation of the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers;
- ❖ The criteria for the selection of mentor teachers and incentives for participation;
- ❖ The development of the mentor teacher training program and a plan for implementation;
- ❖ The creation of an evaluation plan;
- ❖ The identification of building principal responsibilities; and
- ❖ The allocation and use of resources - allocation of personnel time and resources to enable the beginning teacher mentor program to deliver planned services and maximize beginning teacher success. Local funds may be used to pay a stipend to mentor teachers.

### III. Program Design

The program must include a rationale that guides the design of beginning teacher support and assessment services, supports the Standards of Learning and includes the appropriate use of technology. Roles and responsibilities of program participants must be developed collaboratively, clearly defined, and understood by participants. The program design must incorporate the following:

- ❖ Opportunities for communication and feedback among program participants, such as central office staff, school site principals, mentor teachers, beginning teachers, etc.
- ❖ Development of formal and informal linkages among participants, such as institutions of higher education, the Governor's Best Practice Centers, professional organizations and associations, Training Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC), etc.
- ❖ Provision of adequate release time for mentor teachers during the contract day.
- ❖ Support services appropriate to the working conditions experienced by beginning teachers such as teaching assignments for beginning teachers that optimize their chances for success, and provision of additional time and resources when beginning teachers are placed in more challenging settings.
- ❖ Professional development activities for beginning teachers that are designed to implement the SOL and Technology Standards for Instructional Personnel. The activities must be responsive to the individual teacher needs and concerns and should be derived, in part, from formative assessment information.
- ❖ Flexible support systems for the district and the building when a mentor with the content background or at the appropriate grade level is not available.

## IV. Mentor Selection Criteria

The following selection criteria, outlined in The Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act, require that mentors must:

- (i) be classroom teachers who have achieved continuing contract status and who work in the same building as the teachers they are assisting or be instructional personnel who are assigned solely as mentors;
- (ii) be assigned a limited number of teachers at any time; instructional personnel who are not assigned solely as mentors should not be assigned to more than four teachers at any time; and
- (iii) guide teachers in the program through demonstrations, observations, and consultations to promote instructional excellence.

Additional selection criteria that are well-defined, justifiable, and consistent with mentor responsibilities, may be developed by the local board or the mentor advisory committee. They may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ❖ A history of proficient or outstanding performance appraisals;
- ❖ The recommendation of the school principal;
- ❖ The completion of mentor training;
- ❖ Recognition as an outstanding teacher who maintains positive peer relations;
- ❖ Three years of successful teaching experience;
- ❖ Understanding of beginning teacher development;
- ❖ Willingness to participate in support provider/assessor training;
- ❖ Understanding of formative assessment processes;
- ❖ Ability to discuss assessment information and share instructional ideas and materials with beginning teachers;
- ❖ Possession of effective interpersonal and collaborative skills; and
- ❖ Commitment to their own professional growth and learning.

According to §22.1-303.1. of the Code of Virginia, Immunity from Civil Liability for Certain Individuals, “any teacher who, in good faith, participates in conducting a peer review of another teacher or a person who conducts a review of a teacher as a mentor teacher shall be immune from civil liability for any act, omission or statement made in the performance of these duties unless such act, omission or statement was made in bad faith or with malicious intent.”

## V. School Administrator Responsibilities

School administrators must have knowledge of beginning teacher needs and develop an understanding of the role of administrators in supporting each component of the mentor program. School administrator responsibilities also include, but are not limited, to the following:

- ❖ Creation of a supportive school climate;
- ❖ Provision of release time; beginning teachers and their mentor teachers must be given time and opportunities to work together on a regular, ongoing basis;
- ❖ Development of an instructional design that includes a reduced work load or common planning periods for teachers and their mentors and that keeps nonteaching assignments as low as possible;
- ❖ Participation in program orientation;
- ❖ Collaboration with other school administrators to implement the mentor program; and
- ❖ Supervision and evaluation of the professional relationship developed by mentors and teachers.

## **VI. Mentor Training**

Mentor teachers must have the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to beginning teacher needs and to create a collegial community that positively engages program participants. Mentor training must include, but may not be limited, to the following components:

### **Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers**

The Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents were adopted by the Board of Education on January 6, 2000, as required by the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act. The criteria are organized by five major categories that reflect the primary responsibilities of teachers. The major categories of evaluation criteria for teachers are as follows: Planning and Assessment, Instruction, Safety and Learning Environment, Communication and Community Relations, and Professionalism. Mentor training must include information about these categories, the evaluation criteria and performance indicators for each, and how they are utilized in the evaluation of new teachers.

### **Formative Assessment of Beginning Teacher Performance**

A mentor teacher must understand how to assess the performance of each beginning teacher. An assessment with one or more complex measures should be conducted at the onset of the program and at multiple points during the first year. The assessment information should guide the selection of activities in the beginning teacher's individual plan. Assessments of each teacher's strengths and needs help target support services where they are most needed. Ongoing assessments can be used to guide the teacher in establishing and pursuing professional development goals.

### **Development and Use of Individualized Plans**

The mentor teacher must collaborate with the beginning teacher in the development and implementation of an individualized professional development

plan. Individualized plans must be based in part on formative assessment results and must be revised according to the beginning teacher's emerging needs. Individualized plans must primarily address the unique needs of individual teachers but may also include common topics and activities for all participants in the program.

### **Provision of Individualized Assistance**

Support activities must be guided by mentor teachers. Activities must be appropriate to the beginning teacher's individual strengths and needs, must be reflected in the individualized plan, and must be provided in a manner that facilitates beginning teacher growth and development.

The specific form of mentor training will be determined locally and may be conducted in various formats. Components of the training program may also include the following:

- ❖ Learning to observe, coach, and give constructive feedback to peers, including strategies for self-reflection;
- ❖ Utilizing best instructional practices, classroom management, and organization;
- ❖ Dealing with difficult or resistant people and conflict resolution;
- ❖ Enhancing communication skills and building relationships;
- ❖ Clarifying mentor's roles and responsibilities;
- ❖ Practicing time management; and
- ❖ Developing knowledge of school/district policies and procedures including student assessment, curriculum, guides, and supplemental resources.

## VII. Evaluation

The evaluation of the mentor teacher program should involve three major components:

1. Evaluation of the program;
2. Definition of the sources of data; and
3. Standard document design.

The program evaluation should consist of two levels: institutional (evaluates the school division's success in the implementation of the mentor program) and individual (assesses the performance of the new teachers and the mentors).

Evaluation of the mentor teacher program should focus on its effectiveness in meeting the following goals:

1. Retaining quality teachers;
2. Improving teaching performance;
3. Supporting teacher morale, communication, and collegiality; and
4. Facilitating a seamless transition into the first year of teaching.

The evaluation should be comprehensive and ongoing and should include multiple criteria that are related to program goals and objectives. The program evaluation should involve program participants and other stakeholders and lead to substantive program improvements. The school division and all partnership agencies/organizations should participate in the evaluation to assure the quality and effectiveness the program.

Effective evaluation includes the identification of the specific data sources to be used. Clear identification of these sources aid in providing consistency in the evaluation of programs. Sources may include surveys, portfolios and reflective journals, systematic observation (formal/informal), interviews, focus groups, student outcomes (SOL performance and other evidence), and mentor documentation.

## Formative Evaluation

Data resources may further be categorized as formative or summative. Formative resources provide evidence of the growth and development of the candidate at specific intervals during the program. Formative evaluation assesses ongoing project activities and usually consists of an implementation evaluation and a progress evaluation.

An implementation evaluation assesses whether the project is being conducted as planned. The following questions are typical of implementation evaluation:

- ❖ Were the appropriate participants selected and involved in the planning activities?
- ❖ Do the activities and strategies match those described in the plan? If not, are the changes in activities justified and described?
- ❖ Were the appropriate staff members hired, and trained, and are they working in accordance with the proposed plan? Were the appropriate materials and equipment obtained?
- ❖ Were activities conducted according to the proposed timeline? By appropriate personnel?
- ❖ Was a management plan developed and followed?

A progress evaluation assesses the progress made by the participants in meeting the project goals. The following questions are consistent with progress evaluation:

- ❖ Are the participants moving toward the anticipated goals of the project?
- ❖ Which of the activities and strategies are aiding the participants to move toward the goals?

## Summative Evaluation

Summative data resources are reports that are constructed at the conclusion of the mentoring experience. Summative evaluation assesses project success - the extent to which the completed project has met its goals. The following questions are addressed:

- ❖ Was the project successful?
- ❖ Did the project meet the overall goal(s)?
- ❖ Did the participants benefit from the project?
- ❖ What components were the most effective?
- ❖ Were the results worth the project's cost?
- ❖ Is this project replicable and transportable?

An effective evaluation system also includes the design of evaluation instruments that will help to assure fair and consistent implementation of the mentor program. Assessments could include a survey of beginning teachers and mentors to assess the effectiveness of training or to evaluate other services and information. The evaluation system should also provide teacher retention data, information on best practices, and identify emerging needs for new training.

# Teacher Participation Criteria

Section 22.1-303. Probationary Terms of Service for Teachers stipulates that “school boards shall provide each probationary teacher, except probationary teachers who have prior successful teaching experience, as determined by the local school board, a mentor teacher during the first year of the probationary period, to assist such probationary teacher in achieving excellence in instruction.” In addition, experienced teachers who are not performing at an acceptable level, as determined by the school board, may request to participate in the mentor teacher program to improve their performance level.

Upon employment and assignment to a particular grade or subject, the new teacher will also be assigned to a mentor or must be identified as a member of a mentor cohort from the teacher’s school. The teacher should be provided with materials that describe the mentor program, establish a calendar of activities, and clearly state the responsibilities of the mentor and the beginning teacher. Probationary teachers who have prior successful teaching experience, as determined by the school board, need not be provided mentor support.

# Definitions

The following words and terms, when used in these guidelines, shall have the meanings indicated unless the context implies otherwise:

**Beginning Teacher** means a teacher who has completed zero years of full-time teaching experience in a public or an accredited nonpublic school at the time of employment.

**Clinical Faculty** means experienced teachers who have served successfully as cooperating teachers, meet selection criteria established by the college or university, and receive the consistent, extensive training in supervisory skills in order to be designated clinical faculty by a college or university; usually given special status (adjunct) by college or university and have increased involvement in the preparation of new teachers. (Mentor and clinical faculty training may be combined giving classroom teachers the opportunity to assist either student teachers or new teachers.)

**Experienced Teacher** means a teacher who holds Virginia licensure and who has completed at least one year of full-time successful teaching experience in a public school or an accredited nonpublic school. “Experienced teacher” also refers to an individual who is completing requirements for an additional endorsement area and is teaching in the new endorsement area for the first time.

**Formative Evaluation** means an evaluation process that is ongoing, descriptive, nonjudgmental, and performed to help teachers teach better. Formative evaluation is used to identify the teacher’s strengths and weaknesses so that appropriate reinforcement or remediation can occur. Formative evaluation procedures are usually conducted with a team approach rather than in a top down fashion.

**Mentor** means a classroom teacher who has achieved continuing contract status or a retired teacher who meets local mentor selection criteria. The mentors should work in the same building as the teachers they are assisting or be instructional personnel who are assigned solely as mentors. A mentor should be assigned a limited number of teachers at any time. Instructional personnel who are not assigned solely as mentors should not be assigned to more than four teachers at any

time. Mentors guide teachers in the program through demonstrations, observations, and consultations.

**Mentor Advisory Committee** means a group of local education professionals who are appointed by the local school board to carry out the policies and procedures of the local mentor program. The composition of the advisory committee must be made up of teachers and administrators.

**New Teacher** means a teacher who has been hired for the first time by the school system but has already completed at least one year of full-time, successful teaching experience prior to employment. New teacher also refers to individuals who are placed in a new school or who are placed in a new instructional subject or level.

**Summative Evaluation** means an evaluation process that provides data for use in making personnel decisions such as granting tenure, terminating incompetent teachers, and rewarding outstanding teachers. A summative evaluation process helps management make better decisions. It is usually conducted in a top-down fashion by a supervisor to improve the school organization. The goal of summative evaluation is accountability. The products of instruction as well as the process and the person are evaluated.