

## ▶ The Care and Feeding of Your Mentor

It's the Law! You may feel secure and confident enough to think that you don't really need a mentor but The Revised School Code (380.1526) states:

*"For the first 3 years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to 1 or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor or mentors to the teacher."*

Consider these tips for building a positive relationship with your mentor.

- If we lived in a perfect world, you would have a chance to meet your mentor before school starts. But many times, the reality is that you are meeting him/her on the first day of school. Get to know your mentor.
- Mentors aren't mind readers. Don't always expect your mentor to come to you. It's a two-way relationship. They can't anticipate all of your issues and concerns. If possible, set up a regular daily meeting time with your mentor.
- Ask to visit your mentor's classroom to see other approaches to teaching. Invite your mentor to your classroom. Ask for feedback on your techniques and style.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Before you begin developing a unit, find out what materials or ideas your mentor has.
- Let your mentor know that his/her help is appreciated.
- If the relationship between you and your assigned mentor is not all you had hoped it would be, let your association rep know. Mentoring is part of the School Code and many local contracts address the issue because an ineffective mentor relationship hurts everyone. With the help of the association, you may be able to set up a mentor relationship with another colleague who better matches your philosophy and style. Get your association rep's advice on who might be a good match for you.
- Keep an open mind. You may learn a lot from your mentor and at the same time your mentor can learn from you.
- Do what you say you will do. Let your mentor know if you can't follow through on a promise. Suggest an alternative.
- When your mentor offers some information or opinion, make sure you fully understand the information before going on to another topic. Ask questions for clarification.
- Even though you may not always agree with them, acknowledge, understand and respect your mentor's feelings and ideas.
- Avoid making assumptions about your mentor's plans and expectations. If you're in doubt, ask.
- Ask for feedback from your mentor as a way to improve your teaching. Receive the feedback objectively.
- Identify teachers other than your mentor that you would like to observe. Get permission to set up an appointment. Focus on a particular aspect or skill when you go in to observe a classroom. Withhold judgment on what you've observed until you've had the opportunity to reflect on the observation and talk to the teacher.

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- Understand that you have the responsibility to ask for help. Identify and deal with the most pressing need-to-know items first.
- Share your progress with your mentor.
- If there isn't a discussion and support group for you and your fellow new teachers, organize one.
- Take informed risks. Don't take a risk until you've considered all the consequences and you've talked with your mentor.
- Pay attention to the results of your decisions. What have you learned from them?
- Share your enthusiasm for teaching and learning with your more experienced colleagues. They could use a breath of fresh air and a new idea every once in a while.