MENTORING FOR EXCELLENCE: ADMINISTRATOR MENTORING

WHAT IS MENTORING FOR EXCELLENCE?

The Mentoring for Excellence is a program for beginning administrators in their probationary period. The program began 3 years ago with a grant from the Oregon Department of Education. New administrators are paired with a veteran administrator-mentor who meets with them regularly over the course of the school-year. New administrators receive one-on-one mentoring, professional development sessions, and support from their mentor. Program participation included 7 beginning administrators and 1 mentor.

METHODS

This report summarizes the feedback provided by new principals and ODE Adminstrative Mentors in Portland Public Schools. The report includes feedback from those in the ODE New Principal Mentoring Program. New principals in the program were asked to rate the mentoring and support they received to perform well in each of the following Principal Leadership Proficiency Standards:

- **Standard #1 Visionary Leadership:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by stakeholders.

- **Standard #2 Instructional Improvement:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student sustaining a positive school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning a staff professional growth.

- **Standard #3 Effective Management:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

- **Standard #4 Inclusive Practice:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources in order to demonstrate and promote ethical standards of democracy, equity, diversity, and excellence to promote communication among diverse groups.

- **Standard #5 Ethical Leadership:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

- **Standard #6 Socio-Political Context:** An educational leader integrates principles of cultural competency and equitable practice and promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.

Respondents were also asked to provide open-ended feedback on each of the standards, and describe what type of support was still needed. Seven new principals from the 2014-15 ODE Mentoring for Excellence cohort responded to the survey. The results and feedback are summarized and reported in the following sections.

Open-ended feedback was coded and analyzed for patterns related to the area of need and types of improvement needed. Average ratings for those new principals with formal mentoring and informal mentoring were compared to analyze the differences between the two groups. Results and recommendations are synthesized in the following sections.

HOW DO MENTORS SPEND THEIR TIME?

Administrative Mentors spent most of their time coaching new principals on **communication and navigating relationships and systems**. Topics included:

- communicating and coaching staff and teachers,
- communicating with parents, and dealing with student discipline issues. Navigating these relationships was interconnected with new principals' challenge in communicating with these groups.
- In addition, new principals were mentored on how to communicate with community groups and various stakeholders outside the school.
- Many discussions also centered on understanding the PPS District policies and goals.

Administrative Mentors use a tool (CAL) developed by the New Teachers' Center that promotes reflection and inquiry. Mentors and new principals meet weekly and use the tool to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The tool is used to set weekly goals for both the mentor and mentee. The mentor then checks back in with their mentee on progress and challenges.

1. **Program Satisfaction**. Overall, the majority of new prinicpals reported that they had received mentoring in most of the Principal Leadership Proficiency Standards to perform well.

- New principals reported the **weakest level of support** in standards **#1 (Visionary Leadership) and #6 (Socio-Political Context), with 14% r**eporting that they *somewhat disagreed* they had received mentoring and support in these standards.

- New principals reported the **strongest level of support** on standard **#5 (Ethical Leadership), with 86%** reporting that they *agreed* they had received support to perform strongly on the standards.

- In addition to the mentoring and support they received in the Principal Leadership Proficiency standards, the majority of new principals reported that they received support in **leading racial equity work** at their school, with **71% of new principals agreeing that they felt supported.**

Table 1: Mid-Year Administrator Survey Results

Standard	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
Standard 1: Visionary Leadership	14%	29%	57%
Standrad2: Instructional Improvement	0%	43%	57%
Standard 3: Effective Management	0%	50%	50%
Standard 4: Inclusive Practice	0%	43%	57%
Standard 5: Ethical Leadership	0%	14%	86%
Standard 6: Socio-Political Context	14%	29%	57%
Racial Equity Work	0%	29%	71%

Although most new principals reported feeling that they had support to perform well on proficiency standards, open-ended responses indicated a few areas where they needed additional support. Open-ended responses were each coded for "positive feedback" and "needing improvement." The areas principals identified were also coded and then relationships were analyzed. The primary areas in which principals indicated where more support was needed was in the following areas: **Equity work, Parent Involvment, and District Goals.**

Additionally, open-ended feedback was coded for the types of support that were needed. The codes were then analyzed for patterns across principals' responses. Principals indicated that **more trainings was needed earlier** in the process of their on-boarding. Principals also stated that **clearer communication from the district on the goals and expectations** of new principals was needed.

1. **More Training Needed and Earlier**
   New principals felt that more training was needed both for staff and themselves in these areas specifically.

   > *"It would be helpful if the district provided more professional development options that could be done on-site. I've had to assertively find training on differentiation for my staff." –new Principal*

   Additionally, having training and onboarding earlier in their first year would have been beneficial.

   > *"It would have been very helpful to have on-boarding prior to the first Leadership Meeting to support my development." –new Principal*

2. **Expectations and Communication from District**
   Furthermore, respondents reported that having clearer expectations from the District and communcation of those goals would be helpful.

   > *"While my senior director is helpful in supporting my process for establishing a clear vision, when I first arrived in the summer, there were tremendous gaps in my understanding of the district's big picture. Having the information as sooner would have been very helpful." –New Principal*

3. **Navigating a Large District.** One of the challenges discussed by mentors was the learning curve for new principals in navigating a large district. Mentors shared that principals feel isolated in their buildings and at times do not know where to go for answers.

   - Mentors suggested, **"making the district smaller for principals,"** by creating a system of collaboration and sharing among principals on a monthly basis.
   - Additionally, fostering **clearer communication with Senior Directors** would connect principals to PPS District priorities and policies.
   - Furthermore, mentors echoed new principals' request to have **training and onboarding before the school year starts**. This change would allow principals to have the necessary training before educational staff arrives. Time could be used not only for training, but also to connect principals with one another and create a system of support.

Training and Onboarding Earlier

Although new principals reported that formal mentoring was beneficial to their training as a new principals, more support is needed. Specifically, principals shared that training needs to occur earlier in their onboarding. Instead of having training at the start of the school year, principals and ODE Mentors suggested having trainings before the school year begins. Additionally, principals shared their need to have clear communication with the District, especially on expectations and District priorities. Senior Directors may be key in open these lines of communication for their principals.

Structuring Collaboration and Peer Support

In a large district educators may feel isolated, especially when entering into a new position. Finding ways to "make the District smaller" is important for new principals' growth and professional development as new leaders. In addition to formal mentoring, a peer support group would provide interconnection with other professionals and cross-fertilization of ideas. This could reduce isolation and increase new principals' network of resources and support within the District.

Adult Learning and New Roles

Finally, as future training is planned, the District may want to consider principals' transition of roles. New principals may be skilled in the area of instruction, classroom management and/or student engagement, but they are transitioning to a new role outside of the classroom. New principals may need a new set of skills in order to manage the building and lead professional educators. Leading and managing adult relationships is central to this new role. Training and mentoring programs should take into account this transition and embed new set of training to meet this need.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation

These results provide valuable feedback on how new principals feel supported to perform well in on the Principal Leadership Proficiency Standards. Most principals *somewhat agreed or agreed* that they felt supported on each of these standards. Many had suggestions for improvement. In the future, the program could benefit from more in-depth analysis of the types of activities new principals find valuable in supporting their performance. Focus groups or interviews would provide more in-depth understanding of these areas of need.