



MENTORING FOR EXCELLENCE: TEACHER MENTORING

Year-End Evaluation | June 2015

WHAT IS MENTORING FOR EXCELLENCE?

Mentoring for Excellence is a program for beginning teachers in their probationary period. The program began 3 years ago with a grant from the Oregon Department of Education. New teachers in their 1st or 2nd year of teaching are paired with a veteran teacher-mentor who meets with them regularly over the course of the school-year. New teachers receive one-on-one mentoring, professional development sessions, and receive support in lesson planning, classroom management and instruction. Teachers may continue in the program up to 2 years.

Program participation included 218 new teachers (1st or 2nd year in teaching) and 15 teacher mentors. Most mentors carried a caseload of 13-17 mentees.

METHODS

To better understand how the mentoring program influences the experiences of new teachers we asked the following questions:

- 1) how well designed is the mentor program
- 2) do our mentors possess the necessary expertise to serve productively as mentors; and
- 3) how do new teachers profit from the program in terms of support received, job satisfaction, feelings of self-efficacy, and performance?

To help answer these questions, we conducted an ongoing formative evaluation throughout the 2014-15 school year. We gathered data on the following:

- contact time that participating new teachers (and new administrators) spent with their mentor
- conducted a mid-year survey to help measure strengths and needs of new teachers (168 teachers participated)
- held focus groups with mentors to gather feedback,
- reviewed and analyzed retention data, and
- administered end-of-year survey to determine satisfaction with mentoring support, position at school, and ability as a new teacher.

HOW DO MENTORS SPEND THEIR TIME?

Mentors spend their time with teachers in a variety of ways. Generally, mentors spend most of their time providing one-on-one support and resources for their teacher mentees. Average time spent with teacher mentees ranged from 115 hours at the low end, to 297 hours at the high end. All mentors met or exceeded the required 90 hours per mentee. On average, teacher mentors spent 168 hours per mentee over the school year.

Table 1: Average Reported Hours in ODE Log by Mentor

Mentor	One-to-One	Resources	Lesson Planning	Observation	Learning Lab	PD	Avg per Mentee
A	31	53	10	9	1	12	115
B	38	122	3	9	0	19	193
C	39	135	11	6	1	5	198
D	34	57	3	13	3	24	133
E	38	205	2	5	0	17	266
F	25	72	5	5	0	8	116
G	40	176	2	3	2	4	226
H	24	103	13	5	3	9	167
I	42	218	24	5	1	7	297
J	24	59	14	6	1	23	127
K	37	91	2	2	1	23	156
L	37	47	16	4	2	9	114
M	46	121	6	4	1	14	192
N	41	135	4	6	1	5	191
O	32	77	2	19	1	33	164
Total	33	105	7	6	1	14	168

- **60%** of teachers **met weekly in person** with their mentors and **24%** **met every other week**.
- Typically, meetings with mentors lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. On average, **85%** of teachers met with their mentors for **at least 1 hour**.
- **65%** of teachers shared **weekly email communication** and **15%** **communicated by text**.
- The majority of new teachers reported that the time they spent face-to-face with their mentors was just the right amount of time. **85%** of teachers reported it was **just the right amount**, where only **12%** reported that it was **not enough**.

WHAT WORKED?

1. Meeting Teacher Needs

Overall, new teachers taking the Mid-Year survey reported that the mentoring program met their needs.

- **57%** of teachers reported that mentoring **met most or all of their needs** and **32%** reported that mentoring met **some of their needs**.
- Only **11%** of teachers surveyed reported that mentoring did not meet their needs.
- **77%** of teachers reported that they **felt comfortable approaching** their mentor for help when needed.

The following table shows the analysis from open-ended feedback shared by both new teachers and mentors. Both groups were asked to identify what type of support was provided and what support is still needed.

Table 2: Themes—1st Year Mentors and New Teachers

Support Provided:	Support Needed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student engagement*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement and emotional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Engagement and Behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content Area**

*Student engagement was only identified by mentors.

**Content area was only identified by new teachers.

Additionally, teachers were asked which mentoring activities were most beneficial to their development as new teachers.

- Teachers reported that **one-on-one meetings** and **observations of other teachers** were the most beneficial activities.
- Over **90% of teachers reported** that one-on-one meetings were helpful and **70% reported** that observations of other teachers were helpful.

2. Actionable Feedback and Reflection on Practice

New teachers' open-ended responses offer insight into how these activities are helpful and interconnected. Teachers' responses were coded for patterns related to the types of activities that were most supportive.

- More in-depth analysis revealed that one-on-one meetings were beneficial when they provided an opportunity for **actionable feedback** and **reflection upon teaching practice**.
- Sessions were most helpful when they followed **observations of teaching**.
- Additionally, teachers shared the need for more support in the areas: **assessment, lesson planning and curriculum, and content area**.

"Now that I have a better idea what I'm supposed to be teaching, and a little more self-knowledge about my methods, I could really use some help with long-term planning, designing formative assessments, and differentiation." -1st Year Teacher

3. Growth in Teacher Self-Efficacy

Beginning teachers' reported that mentors helped them become more **aware of their practice, develop strategies to manage their classrooms** and **gain confidence** in their ability as new teachers.

"Prior to mentoring, I was not sure how I was doing as a teacher. Having my mentor observe me and validate what I am doing has helped to boost my confidence. My mentor also provided me with helpful feedback, advice, and strategies to improve my teaching--in a non-threatening helpful way. I now feel like a competent, successful teacher." -Beginning Teacher

Beginning teachers described becoming **more self-aware** as a result of the mentoring they received. Many also **felt validated** by recognizing their strengths in addition to receiving feedback on ways to improve their practice.

“I feel like I have someone to bounce ideas, thoughts and instincts off of. I often have conversations with my mentor that gets my thinking deeper about things. I feel confident knowing that someone is looking out for me and my students in a non-evaluative way!” –Beginning Teacher

In addition to open ended responses, beginning teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements, rating their confidence in each area **before mentoring** and **after mentoring**.

- The seven statements measure the level of confidence teachers felt in the following areas: Content Knowledge, Differentiated Instruction, Student Engagement, Student Behavior, Student Learning, Student Performance and Cultural Competency.
- The statements were then combined to form a Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale. The results show a **statistically significant increase** in beginning teachers’ level of confidence after mentoring in the 7 areas. These results suggest that mentoring may increase teachers’ levels of self-efficacy in their classrooms.

Table 3: Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

Items	Avg. % Increase
Content Knowledge	19%*
Differentiated Instruction	23%*
Student Engagement	19%*
Student Behavior	21%*
Student Learning	15%*
Student Performance	19%*
Cultural Competency	13%*

N = 146 *p ≤.01

4. Supporting Teacher Retention and Reducing Turnover

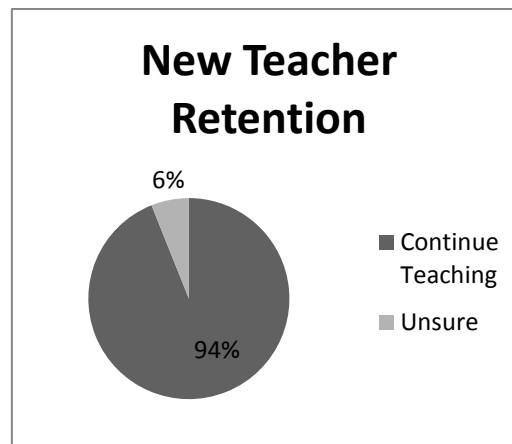
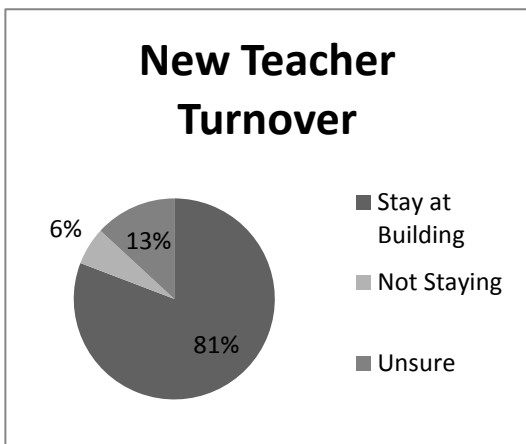
Overall, beginning teachers were very satisfied with the support they received through the PPS mentoring program. Many teacher respondents in the survey shared that this program was the most important support they received as a new teacher.

“The mentoring program is the single most important resource that helped me survive through the first year of teaching. Without this program, I would still be struggling as a teacher. However, this year has improved 100% from last and I hope to continue improving my instruction to reach more students every year.” –Beginning Teacher

Many teachers in the survey described feeling overwhelmed and filled with anxiety as a first year teacher. The mentoring program helped calm their anxieties and provide them with guidance and support.

“As a first year teacher, doing everything for the first time can be overwhelming, and my mentor helped me through everything and helped me learn from each experience. My mentor teacher provided me with a safe environment to share my experiences and feelings without judgement and worry.” –1st Year Teacher

Teachers shared that their mentors not only helped them improve their teaching practice and support their students, but their mentors have encouraged them and prevented burn out.



- Over **93%** of teachers reported that they hoped to continue teaching, with only **6%** reporting that they were unsure.
- **Eighty-one percent** of teachers reported that they hoped to continue teaching at the same school.
- **Seventy-four percent** of teachers reported that mentored influenced their decision to stay in the teaching profession. Only **17%** reported that it had **little or no influence** on their decision to stay.
- **96%** of new teachers in the program were still employed as a teacher at PPS after 3 years.
- **94%** of **mentored teachers** were retained in their first year of teaching, compared to **92%** of **non-mentored teachers**.

This feedback suggests that mentoring may positively influence teacher retention and prevent high turnover at the school-level. The mentoring program should continue and consider offering a longer period for mentoring to cover the entire probationary period to prevent turnover.

5. Strengths-Based Approach

Teachers and mentors positively described the strengths-based approach to mentoring. Teachers described feeling validated and at the same time pushed to improve their practice.

“Having a mentor who came in to really pump me up and to point out all of the things that were actually going

well eased a lot of those fears and made me feel much more capable. It also helped me to focus in on a couple of areas that I wanted to improve on rather than feeling overwhelmed by all of the things I felt I needed to do better.” –Beginning Teacher

Mentors also described the value of a strengths-based approach and shared how useful the **CAL tool** was in guiding this process. Mentors shared that this was one of the most valuable tools they use in their mentoring work.

“They [CAL tools] really pushed the work forward and it’s especially good for teachers who you know tend to stay in crisis mode and tend to stay in this vortex of negativity...and don’t want to work forward, teachers who mire the problem more than doing the work to solve it. And you know well let’s try this, and then you can move forward with it.” –1st Year Mentor

This tool has provided a starting point for mentors to begin conversations with their mentees and follow up on their progress.

- Mentors and teachers suggested that this tool and a **strength-based approach** support **reflection and self-awareness**, which is necessary for improving their practice.
- Both mentors and beginning teachers suggested that there needs to be a more **consistent feedback loop** in order for teachers to feel supported. The tool is useful but only when there is follow-through with actionable steps.

CHALLENGES

1. Caseload Distribution and Scheduling

- One area in which mentors felt strongly about was the distribution of caseload. Most mentors had between **14-16 mentors**, located at various schools throughout PPS. Although it is difficult to know where new teachers will be located, this area should be addressed.
- Mentors agreed that having fewer mentees at fewer schools would make the job more manageable and increase their flexibility.

“I feel like there’s four people every week, I feel like I have to rotate who’s going to get the short end of the stick that week. And I just, I just put them on rotation. Just so everyone is equally getting it.”

2. Relationships and Growth

- Mentors discussed the need to establish relationships with their mentees, which encompassed the first part of the school year. Some mentors felt frustrated that the change in their mentees was moving very slowly. While this is a necessary part of the work, planning for and intentionally integrating relationship building early in the process may help the work move faster with mentees.
- Hosting a mentor/mentee orientation or team building session may allow new teachers a time to deal with some of the early challenges of teaching, build trust with their mentor and connect to a support group outside of their building.

- The orientation could also be used to go over expectations and guidelines for the program and PSU credit, which was a concern among mentors. Having clear expectations of the mentoring relationship could help move the forward by having consistency across mentoring relationships.

3. Systemic Challenges

Teachers and mentors expressed feeling discouraged and overwhelmed by some of the systemic challenges of which they did not have control over.

- Both groups discussed challenges with **administrators or colleagues** in their building, **limited resources** and **dysfunctional teams**. Mentors described the tremendous challenge new teachers face at their buildings.

“So I’m glad that they get the mentoring. They should all have to do it, because they get the [worst] placements usually. I mean, were you guys looking for chairs at the beginning of the year, because they’re weren’t chairs in their room?! I mean I did!” –1st Year Mentor

- In some cases mentors and new teachers described **buildings and classrooms having limited resources and access to curriculum**. This challenged new teachers and mentors helped support them in finding and accessing these resources so they could start teaching.
- Additionally, mentors described the difference **the building leadership and team of teachers** has on the experience of beginning teachers.

Mentors helped beginning teachers navigate some of the systemic challenges and relationships within their building. Many mentors described this as their primary role for the first few months of the school year.

NEXT STEPS

Caseload and Mentor/Mentee Matching

One important issue that emerged from both the Mentor Focus groups and New Teacher Mid-Year Survey was the challenge of heavy caseloads and the geographic distance mentors have to travel. This not only adds stress to the mentor’s work, but decreases the amount of time and frequency mentors have to meet with teachers. Mentors are not always able to follow up with their mentees on a consistent basis.

Pairing new teachers with mentors is a difficult task considering the fluidity of hiring new teaching staff each year. One strategy to help deal with this challenge would be to coordinate with Systems Planning and Performance during late summer when staffing is more formalized to coordinate the caseload distribution of mentors. PPS Systems Planning & Performance has developed a formula to determine staffing in the district which could be used as a resource to aid mentor/mentee matching.

Future Research and Evaluation

Looking forward after 3 years of programming, we will be able to explore how mentoring influences learning in more depth. Future evaluation and research will begin to study the impact the Mentoring for Excellence program has on teaching and learning at Portland Public Schools, and begin to answer the questions:

- What impact does mentoring have on teaching and learning?
- What impact does mentoring have on retention and turnover?
- How does mentoring influence teaching, learning and retention?

The following methods could be used to answer these questions:

- **Pre and Post Survey of Teacher Self-Efficacy.** The survey will be given to a sample of both mentored and non-mentored teachers to compare change between groups over the school year.
- **School-based Retention and Turnover.** Although PPS has a high retention rate district-wide, analysis at the school-level is needed to understand how mentoring may reduce turnover or movement between schools.
- **Qualitative Comparative Study.** To better understand how mentoring influences teaching, learning and retention mentored and non-mentored teachers would be interviewed. This method provides an in-depth understanding of the processes and experiences of teachers, and how mentoring may influence their experiences.