

A Summary of Beginning Teacher Needs

Understanding the needs of beginning teachers is a critical component in the mentoring process. As with any relationship that involves a mentor and a mentee, the mentor must be prepared to treat each beginning teacher as an individual and provide support based on the teacher's particular needs. Mentors cannot approach their mentees with a one-size-fits-all approach: What works for one mentee may not work for another. It is very important to understand that the needs of beginning teachers can vary based on multiple factors including schedules, content area, school demographics, student behavior, parental involvement, quality of the mentee's teacher preparation program, and so on. Mentors should realize that beginning teacher needs also vary during different times of the academic year. Needs can range from something as simple as needing to know whom to talk to at the beginning of the academic year about setting up direct deposit to something much more difficult as dealing with a disruptive student during end-of-the-year testing.

Regardless of the need being addressed, it will typically fall into one of these three categories: **social/emotional, physical, or instructional**. Social/emotional needs of beginning teachers ideally have to be met before any quality instruction can take place. Teachers need to feel valued as an integral part of something meaningful. They need to be heard and made to feel that their struggles are valid and that they are important members of an institutional system that fosters support and development. Establishing personal connections is also necessary in meeting social/emotional needs. Many beginning teachers are new to the area, some may have no family or friends nearby, and others may be away from their home for the very first time. These are all possible scenarios that a mentor must be prepared to handle and able to help the beginning teacher find his/her place in the school and in the community.

Physical needs of beginning teachers are centered on structure, culture, policies, and procedures. The term physical, in this sense, does not refer to the "body." It refers to the "building" – the procedural, structural, and operational aspects of the building. Teachers must understand how the school operates outside of instruction – the "who's" and "how's" of the school. Whom do I call if I need a restroom break during class? How do I secure a substitute teacher when I have an upcoming doctor's appointment? Beginning teachers also need to be made aware of school culture. This could mean informing them about the level of support to expect from administration when it comes to teachers pursuing professional development opportunities or the level of parental involvement occurring throughout the school. A mentor should also be prepared to communicate district policies and procedures with beginning teachers, particularly those that may not be fully enforced in the school or those that are not necessarily written in a handbook, but are just "understood."

Social/emotional and physical needs can be viewed as basic needs, like in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These basic, lower-level needs must be reasonably satisfied before meeting more advanced, higher-level needs – creativity, problem-solving, lack of prejudice, etc. – that are often instructional in nature. The instructional needs category is immense. It includes any needs a teacher has that affect his/her ability to plan lessons effectively, deliver quality instruction to every student in the classroom, and assess learning. Instructional needs also include topics such

as building relationships with parents and students, scheduling, and grading. An instructional need could be related to help with locating materials for a particular lesson, or it could involve assistance with teaching a group of special education students who are in the class.

Due to recent changes in our teacher evaluation systems, beginning teachers may need their mentors to help with writing Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). Again referring to Maslow, once these instructional needs are satisfied and beginning teachers begin to gain self-esteem and confidence in the classroom, they will begin to develop a sense of efficacy. Teachers who have a sense of efficacy are more likely to exhibit the specific teaching behaviors that foster their own professional growth and the academic growth of their students. Efficacy is, therefore, one of the overarching goals of any mentor relationship.

Although beginning teachers require various levels of differentiated support, there are some common needs that mentors may encounter with their mentees. Also, there may be needs that fall into more than one of these categories. The following bulleted lists include a variety of potential beginning teacher needs, but should not be considered all-inclusive lists.

Social/Emotional

- Need to feel valued
- Relational connections
- Location of resources – people or materials
- Sense of efficacy

Physical

- Culture – professional learning communities, institutional support
- School/district structure and policies – procedural issues outside of instruction, administrative procedures
- Location of resources – people or materials
- Professionalism – school norms related to dress codes, on-time behaviors, cell phone use, computer use, teacher-student interactions

Instructional

- Support for data analysis/writing SLOs
- Instructional support – instructional technology, lesson planning, pedagogy, content knowledge, assessment strategies, reflection
- Professionalism – professional organization membership, life-long learning, advocacy
- Classroom management – working with specific groups of students (poverty, special education, behavioral, ESL), classroom management plans, engagement
- Parental contacts – ongoing communication, conferences
- Location of resources – people or materials