Mentoring Program

New Faculty Induction Program/ Georgia Connections Academy 2014-2015

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7/20/2014
I. **Describe Goals and Objectives:**

Grounded in the belief that new teacher induction should be an ongoing process supported through multiple methods, Georgia Connections Academy provides both whole group and individual mentoring to our newest educators.

New teacher induction and mentoring should be focused and intentional. We believe retaining teachers in our school will improve student achievement. As a virtual school, it is vitally important we provide support through a cohort type experience and a mentoring experience. Templeton & Tremont (2014) perfectly outline how a mentor can support and coach individuals by emerging new teachers in a supportive process. Unlike the cohort model, the mentor-mentee relationship is an individual one providing immediate feedback aimed at personal development.

Our initial plan was a yearlong cohort model for new teachers along with an assigned mentor. After much discussion and debate among the leadership team, a decision emerged that this was not the most effective model to provide professional development and support to our new teachers. Unlike a traditional school, very few teachers enter Georgia Connections Academy knowing how to teach in a virtual environment. Moving into this role means a paradigm shift from a brick and mortar classroom into a classroom without borders. In addition, a new teacher must quickly master necessary technical tools in order to begin the school year successfully.

To aid in effective planning, we began with the outcome in mind. We believe that not only must new teachers learn to become effective virtual educators they also must buy into the values and the culture of our school. Simply providing the technical skills is not enough to achieve our desired outcomes.
Our school follows Richard DuFour’s model of Professional Learning Communities. The foundation to this model is the formation of collaborative teams working together to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable (DuFour, R., 2004). If this is the goal we set for all teachers, including our new teachers, we must support them in this process by providing them with a mentor teacher to scaffold how this process works.

II. Literature Review on effective mentoring programs, strategies for mentoring

There is much literature to support the effectiveness of a beginning teacher-mentoring program. In his article, Huling-Austin states to survive the shock of classroom reality, novice teachers need collegial support from experienced teachers and peers. He reflects that more experienced teachers provide much more than ‘technical assistance’ to their mentees, but fill a role to reflect on deep teaching practices and methodologies. Ehrich, Hansford & Tennet agree with these statements and further believe administrators should build mentoring program that include basic survival strategies and time for deep reflections on the pedagogy of teaching. Their research found of 80% of participants in structured mentoring programs felt positive about their experience. Researchers found the most frequent comment dealt with building a collaborative spirit amongst the staff.

Our program was based on the research of effective mentoring programs and includes strategies such as those by Templeton & Tremont (2014). Mentoring is a “form of coaching” and it must “address differing levels of readiness” (p. 55). As we encourage our teachers to scaffold instruction for our students, so must our program have scaffolding for our newest teachers.

In their study reviewing the impact on induction and mentoring programs for new teachers, Ingersoll & Strong (2011) found that most showed that beginning teachers
who participated in some kind of induction had higher job satisfaction, commitment, or retention. Further, these teachers had higher student achievement and performed better in various tasks such as “using effective student questioning practices, adjusting classroom activities to meet students’ interests, maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere, and demonstrating successful classroom management” (p 1).

It is clear from the research that a program of teacher induction utilizing a mentor-mentee relationship can provide deep meaning to new teachers by providing support and encouragement on an ongoing basis. This program must be developed with the end result in mind for each new teacher in a collaborative environment.

III. Mentor Qualification

We began by selecting teachers who had a proven track record of success in our school. This included teachers who had mastered our Learning Management System and had demonstrated positive student achievement over the course of two school years. The mentor teacher must be an individual who can answer basic technical questions with ease and correctness, and imbue our culture and climate. As a leadership team, we discussed our teaching staff and the specific criteria that used to pick individuals of the highest caliber. An additional criteria was each mentor should work in the same school or department as the mentee. Each grade band and area has such specific needs that only someone from the same area could really support the new teachers.

IV. Specific Strategies and Procedures for Implementation

This New Faculty Induction Program has two levels of support. The first level is a cohort experience to allow the group of new teachers to work together to conquer necessary skills
needed for success in the online environment. As our teachers must “hit the ground running’ in using the Learning Management System and other technical programs we decided to have one class a week lasting 90 minutes for this cohort group. The class will meet on the first Wednesday of every month directly following our full faculty meeting. Topics addressed are:

1. Communication with families
   a. Using Webmail
   b. Phone etiquette
   c. In person events

2. Connexus Basics (Connexus is our learning management system)
   a. How to see if a student has an IEP/504
   b. Finding addresses /phone numbers
   c. How to log all contacts
   d. Completing your school year cycle tasks

3. Live Lesson
   a. How our system works
   b. How to take attendance
   c. How to record your lesson
   d. How to send you recording
   e. How to let students into the room
   f. How to remove students from your room and document any issues

4. Time Management
   a. Using your Outlook Calendar

5. State Testing in a Virtual School
6. Software Training
   a. How to use Ulti-pro to ask for time off
   b. How to use Concurr to reimburse expenses

7. Data and Reports
   a. How to pull reports
   b. How sort reports
   c. How to use the data

8. Q & A and Wrap Up

In conjunction with the cohort model, each new teacher will be assigned a mentor using the criteria located in the section concerning mentors. The mentors and mentees will meet in person at the beginning of year event. Each team will then meet weekly throughout the year for coaching, support, and more. The mentor will be provided with a list of topics needing covering, but will also be encouraged to work with the mentee on developing personal goals for the year. Each team will meet with their supervisor once a month to review and discuss ongoing sessions.

In addition to our school wide cohort group and mentor-mentee sessions, new teachers will attend a weekly training session provided by our parent organization Connections Academy. This training begins eight weeks into the school year, as the cohort group wraps up the initial Georgia Connections Academy trainings. These sessions will build upon our trainings and will be ongoing throughout the year. Teachers will be required to produce an artifact after each session reviewed by their manager.
V. Establish program Evaluation Criteria and Procedures

This program will be evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively throughout the year. We believe that what is expected must be inspected! Each manager will meet with the mentor-mentee pair monthly to ensure completion of required activities. These interviews will be documented and studied to look for emerging themes from the program. Quantitative data will be collected via Sharepoint, an online, anonymous survey developed by the leadership team using questions developed from the qualitative interview themes. This mixed methodology framework should provide our school with an answer to the effectiveness of our new teacher induction program.


