

Making Mentoring More Effective in Texas: Reflective Questions to Analyze and Strengthen Support for New Teachers

In many districts, new teachers have a mentor in their first year. But often the role of mentor is not well defined, and little training or release time is provided to ensure mentors provide high quality support to help new teachers actually improve in their instruction. To address this challenge, Texas created the Mentor Program Allotment (MPA) in 2019 as part of House Bill 3. MPA funds training and support for mentors of first- and second-year teachers. Districts provide training for mentors on research-based teaching practices and ensure that mentors and mentees meet for a minimum of 12 hours each semester.

As a partner in this work, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching interviewed teachers and leaders in multiple Texas districts who are making changes to their mentoring programs. Our [report](#) shares three strategies with specific action steps for strengthening mentorship programs that we found were making a difference. We developed reflective questions under each strategy to help you as a district or school leader to analyze your current practices and consider how you could strengthen support for new teachers through mentors. Reflective questions can be used to identify areas where your mentoring program is already strong, as well as areas for potential improvement.

If you have a mentoring program in place, use these questions to guide a review of your program, and consider engaging district-level leaders, school leaders, mentors, and new teachers in the process. If you are developing a new mentoring program, these questions can facilitate a discussion as you design a program based on your specific needs and context.

Reflective questions on Strategy 1: Focus mentoring on instructional improvement.

- What is the purpose of your mentoring program, and how is that communicated to teachers and school leaders? How is it communicated to new teachers?
- How are you selecting mentors?
- How are mentor teachers and new teachers paired? If a new teacher is not paired with an educator in their same grade and/or subject, how is the new teacher supported in that grade/subject?
- How does mentorship support and/or supplement other instructional feedback and professional learning for new teachers?

Reflective questions on Strategy 2: Support mentors to be more effective by providing training, tools, and protocols for the role.

- What resources support your mentor program? Consider funding, time, tools, handbooks, trainings, and other types of resources or supports.
- How do you develop a shared language and shared understanding of strong mentoring practices among your teachers, including mentors and mentees?
- What compensation is provided for the mentor role?
- How much time is allocated for mentors to support new teachers? When is that time on their schedules?
- How often are mentors in new teachers' classrooms?
- How often are mentors themselves observed as coaches?
- What can mentors do to strengthen the quality of their feedback? How can school leaders support them in doing so?
- What data or student work can be used to determine whether new teachers are improving and whether a mentor's support is having an impact?

- What does the coaching cycle look like for mentors to provide feedback for new teachers? What does the coaching cycle look like for leaders to provide feedback to mentors?
- Are there opportunities for mentors to collaborate to grow their capacity and skills? Are similar opportunities provided for new teacher collaboration and learning?

Reflective questions on Strategy 3: Align the mentoring program with district and school systems and goals.

- Are there ways for mentors to learn from school or district leadership about key goals and priorities and how those connect to the mentoring program?
- In what ways is the work of mentor teachers integrated with school leadership structures and school systems such as professional learning or leadership teams?
- In what ways is the work of mentors designed to advance district and school priorities or initiatives such as the introduction of a new curriculum?
- In your school or district, how could the work of mentors strengthen a current priority or initiative?

As you engage teachers and leaders in the process of reviewing and strengthening your mentoring program, take a look at the effective strategies from the districts we studied for our report, *Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, and How to Fix It*, and related resources for [strengthening new teacher mentoring](#).