**Matchmaking in Mentoring Programs**

Advice from Massachusetts school districts

As part of the [2016 MA Induction and Mentoring Report](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/mentor/reports.html), school districts listed two components of their mentoring and induction programs that are going well (based on feedback from mentors, mentees, administrators and other stakeholders). Districts also listed two areas that they aimed to improve. The most popular responses on *both* lists included **pairing up mentors and mentees**. Thus, ESE asked those districts who experienced success in making matches to share their advice for other districts.

**The matching process**

Approaches to finding matches vary, from an administrator independently making decisions to a team considering mentors’ and mentees’ input. Examples include:

* Principals look at all mentor applications to make matches
* Use the results of a survey for mentees on their experience, education, interests, etc.
* Mentor coordinator maintains a relationship with principals so that he/she is aware of which teachers would make good mentors
* Ask mentors and mentees what type of partner they’d prefer, and what topics they’d like to discuss together
* Local union works with principals to approve matches

**Considerations for matching mentors to mentees**

The most common criteria include finding a mentor with the same role (including grade level/content area) in the same school building. Other suggested criteria include:

* Physical proximity within the school, to encourage frequent informal interactions
* Aligned schedules (prep times; stop and start times)
* Teaching styles

Some districts explained that they prioritize other criteria over matching job functions.

* “Though consideration is given to content area matches, this is not always the ideal match. Mentoring is about much more than content matching (which will happen naturally).”
* “We do not assign job-alike mentors, as teachers work closely with their grade level teams. The new staff then have two layers of support: curriculum support from their team and the mentor for all other supports.”

**Matching mentees with uncommon roles**

Many districts noted challenges in finding good matches for mentees with less-common roles, such as a technology teacher or a Speech Language Pathologist. While these districts ranged in size, some small districts explained that their size was a particular barrier. Some of the suggestions included here come from districts who advised that being strategic is useful for matching in small districts.

* Hire retirees as mentors
* Use effective educators from other districts
* Identify a mentor who works in a different role now, but has held the mentee’s role in the past
* If a mentee has a job-alike mentor from outside the district, also provide an in-school mentor (albeit with a different role) to help orient the mentee to the district and school
* Have flexible policies – look at each match on a “case by case basis” to ensure the best available matches
* Build a supportive culture that values mentoring, where becoming a mentor is an honor 🡪 less likely to have a lack of mentors, even in uncommon roles
	+ One small district described a “dedicated, seasoned faculty who believe in the power of team and collaboration;” this sense of teamwork is also helpful if they have a last-minute hire and need to seek and train a new mentor
	+ “There is a culture of support and collaboration already inherent in our buildings, so mentoring is a role that teachers want to take on”
* Actively seek and train mentors in areas where there aren’t enough or aren’t any
* When there isn’t a mentor available with the same role (in the school or elsewhere) think about the functions and skills that the job requires
	+ “This year we matched similar positions: Guidance Counselor and Psychologist. While they serve different functions, they are often in the same meetings and have similar conversations with families and teachers. PE teachers have been matched with Art teachers (as sole practitioners in a building) because knowing how the role of a specialist functions in a building may outweigh the need for a mentor in the same content area – as we have Directors and Department Heads who can help with content as needed”
* Provide role-specific supports beyond the standard mentoring program
	+ One district hired its first elementary French teacher and, in addition to providing an in-district mentor, provided opportunities for the mentee to observe four nearby schools that had elementary French programs