First-Year Special Education Teacher Mentoring Plan

November 2024
Arkansas Department of Education
Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Assigning a Mentor

The district will implement the first-year special education mentoring plan and assign an experienced mentor teacher to each mentee. Coaching training for mentors is recommended, but is not mandatory, as mentees are not classified as novice teachers. For districts interested in mentor coaching, Student-Centered Coaching with Diane Sweeney is recognized by DESE and available at no cost through Arkansas IDEAS.

Guidance and Resources for Mentoring Support

District support options for mentees are categorized as follows.

- **Increase instructional effectiveness for academics and behavior.**
  - Determine additional preparation and support needs through the Professional Growth Plan (PGP) self-assessment process in the ADE Educator Effective System.
  - Support engagement in collaborative planning efforts.
  - Provide resources to improve instructional effectiveness.
  - Assist in development of schedule that protects instructional time.
  - Ensure awareness and implementation of instructional supports available in district curriculum (High Quality Instructional Materials - HQIM) in order to ensure student access to grade-level, standards-based instruction (e.g., scaffolding, differentiated activities, accommodations, targeted interventions, strategy instruction, Universal Design for Learning).
  - Locate and share materials and sample lessons.
  - Facilitate access to professional development (PD) activities.
  - Co-teach when possible.
  - Provide opportunities for peer observations and debrief afterward.
  - Engage in collaborative lesson planning when needed.
  - Monitor progress and offer support.
    - Use reflective questioning techniques.
    - Reflect and discuss classroom practices regularly.

- ○ Observe the mentee's classroom to reflect on practices and offer feedback and guidance.
- ○ Conduct post-observation meetings to reflect and offer feedback.
- ○ Reference growth rubrics or action plans to assess goal attainment.

- **Increase awareness and application of special education policies and procedures.**
  - Support compliance with legal requirements and policies in special education (e.g.,timelines, informed consent, goal progress monitoring and reporting, IEP services documentation, general education teacher access to IEP accommodations and modifications).
  - Establish data tracking systems and IEP goal progress monitoring expectations.
  - Provide training and support on district special education procedures (e.g., child find, referral process, evaluations, IEPs) and how to use IEP software.
  - Model and provide guided practice opportunities for collaborative IEP development.
  - Model and provide guided practice opportunities for facilitating IEP meetings.
  - Assist in reviewing student folders to prepare for individual students' instructional and support needs.
    - ○ Determine training needs for disability related supports and the provision of specially designed instruction for individual students.
  - Provide guidance for working collaboratively with general educators and related services providers to schedule and implement IEP services.
  - Provide training and support in working collaboratively with paraprofessionals.
  - Review assistive technology resources.
    - ○ Ensure familiarity with Texthelp, uPar, and Equatio.
  - Utilize [Bootcamp Training Resource](#) to support mentoring activities.
    - ○ Establish a monthly calendar of topics to address.

Required Activities

Professional development activities for mentees are organized into four components: High Leverage Practices, Observation and Feedback, Self-Paced PD Options, and Monthly Hot Topics Sessions. Mentees must complete activities from each component guided by self-assessment and feedback from their Mentor.

The district will verify completion of required activities and maintain documentation including any associated artifacts. The ADE Educator Effectiveness System should be used to document activities as part of the PGP process.

Component I: High Leverage Practices
In partnership with the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed and published a set of high-leverage practices (HLPs) for special educators and teacher candidates. The HLPs are organized around four aspects of practice:
- [Collaboration](#)
- [Assessment](#)

- [Social/Emotional/Behavioral](#)
- [Instruction](#)

From these four aspects of practice, 22 are intended to address the most critical practices that every K-12 special education teacher should master and be able to demonstrate. The selected practices are used frequently in classrooms and have been shown to improve student outcomes if successfully implemented.

The [High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities website](#) includes a series of videos that introduce each HLP and provide a brief demonstration of the practice. The sample videos are drawn from real teachers implementing HLPs with intensity matched to the unique learning or social needs of their students with and without IEPs. Although not all HLPs have corresponding videos, additional videos are regularly added.

- **Activity 1:** Mentors will guide mentees in selecting specific High Leverage Practices (HLP)* to focus on using the *[High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities Self-Assessment Tools](#)*. It is not required to complete the entire self-assessment. Mentees can choose specific subtests based on perceived areas of need or interest, or they may use the short screener to identify key practices to prioritize. Following the assessment, mentees will set one or more PGP goals and outline two or more action steps to target specific practices. Please note this activity does not replace the Self-Assessment process within the EES system.
- **Evidence of learning:** The HLP Self-Assessment should be uploaded into the EES system as part of the PGP process.

*To enhance support for mentors and mentees, districts should consider investing in *High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms.*

Component II: Peer Observation
Peer observation advances learning through reflective practice. By assigning specific practice(s) for observation, mentors can strengthen debriefing conversations, amplifying professional learning results.

- **Activity 2:**
  - Mentees will observe teachers who are using selected HLP(s) or other targeted practices (e.g., classroom management techniques, explicit instruction, how another special education teacher leads an IEP meeting) - at least **one observation quarterly**. Mentors will reflect with mentee on observations and provide feedback.
  - Mentors will observe mentees - at least **one observation quarterly.** Mentors will reflect with mentee on observations and provide feedback.
  - Mentors will check in with mentees according to the following timeline:
    - Week 1: Daily
    - Week 2 through week 8: At least weekly
    - Week 9 through the end of the school year: At least bi-weekly
- **Evidence of learning:** Reflection activities, notes, checklists, etc., should be uploaded into the EES system as part of the PGP process.

Component III: Self-Paced PD Options
A menu of self-paced PD options has been developed to support learning needs of mentees.

- **Activity 3:** Mentees will complete a minimum of **two modules**, **activity reflections, or district-choice PD options** aligned with PGP goals. At least one option must be chosen from the menu provided below.
    - **PD Menu For First Year Special Educators**
        - For IRIS modules, mentees will register for a module and download the Professional Development certificate at the end of the module. Scores of 80% or better are required for each course.
        - For activity reflections, mentees will research the targeted practice and work with their mentor to reflect on how they currently use the strategy described.
        - District choice options include, but are not limited to:
            - Completing additional learning modules from the menu.
            - Recording implementation of a targeted practice with students and self-reflecting or reflecting with the mentor on strengths and areas for growth.
            - Journaling and self-reflection on growth in the implementation of a targeted practice.
- **Evidence of learning**: Reflection activities and PD certificates should be uploaded in the EES system as part of the PGP process.

Component IV: Monthly Hot Topic Sessions
Monthly online sessions, hosted by ADE Staff and other experts in the field, focus on current issues in Special Education with recordings available for later viewing. These sessions, open to any educator, provide an opportunity to learn about current issues and initiatives at the state and federal level, ask questions, build a network of support, and provide a springboard for deeper study and learning at the local level. Monthly topics are chosen based on participant needs.

- **Activity 4:** Mentees will participate in **Hot Topics sessions at least once per quarter** and engage in reflective discussions with their mentors to explore and apply the information covered.
- **Evidence of learning**: Reflection activities and PD certificates should be uploaded into the EES system as part of the PGP process.

References:
Mississippi Department of Education. (2020). The Mentor Guidebook: Supporting New Special Education Teachers in Mississippi 2021 – 2022. Retrieved from https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/documents/OEE/21_22_the_mentor_guidebook_v1.pdf
Council for Exceptional Children in Partnership with CEEDAR Center, High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities website resources. Retrieved from High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities website https://highleveragepractices.org/
McLeskey, J., Maheady, L., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M. T., & Lewis, T. J. (Eds.). (2019). High leverage practices for inclusive classrooms. New York, NY: Routledge