

Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program

Background Information

The Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program has been operational since August 1, 1994. In the early years of the program (1994-1998), the program consisted of a support semester and an assessment semester. During the support semester, the three-person assessor team (principal, experienced teacher, and external assessor) each visited the new teacher one time. During these visits, the assessors conducted "practice" observations and interviews, shared results with the teacher, and assisted him/her in creating a professional development plan targeting strategies to improve weaker areas in the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, the basis for the assessment. Many assessors provided additional assistance to the new teacher as opportunity and time allowed.

New teachers who completed the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program consistently rated the assistance and support of their assessors, particularly experienced teachers, as one of the strongest parts of the program. This fact led the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to request that the support, or "mentoring," phase of the program be strengthened.

In the Spring of 1997, the legislation undergirding the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program was changed to create the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program. The three-person assessment team was changed to a two-member team (principal/designee and an assessor external to the school) that functioned only in the assessment semester (the new teacher's second semester). New teacher support and assistance became the responsibility of a mentor teacher who was assigned at the start of the semester and remained in a mentoring role for two semesters. During the 1997-98 school year, the Louisiana Department of Education piloted the mentor program to determine policies, procedures, activities, and training before statewide implementation of the program occurred during the 1998-99 school year.

In April 2001 the BESE approved the recommendations from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality. The recommendations related to the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program emphasized the importance of mentoring and assistance for the success of new teachers. Responding to the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission, the amount of time new teachers are mentored at their schools was expanded to one full year before assessment. The structure of the mentoring program was changed from one to two years in order to enhance the quality of interaction between mentors and new teachers.

What Is the Mentor Program?

The Louisiana mentor program constitutes one part of the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program which is designed to help the new teacher become a competent, confident professional in the classroom as quickly as possible and to offer support and assistance as he/she meets the performance standards established as a criterion for certification. At the beginning of the teacher's first year of experience in a Louisiana public school classroom, he/she is assigned a mentor or mentor support team by the building principal or school system. That mentor or mentor support team provides support and technical assistance of several kinds throughout the initial two years of employment.

During the second year, the new teacher will also be assigned an assessment team consisting of the principal or principal designee and an assessor from outside the building. Each assessor will visit once to collect data upon which to base the team's certification recommendation. In the event the two members are in disagreement over the certification recommendation and the disagreement cannot be resolved, the Local Education Agency (LEA) Contact Person will appoint a third assessor external to the school. The mentor has no role or responsibility in the assessment process or the certification recommendation.

ASSISTANCE

The Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program is a uniform statewide program for new teachers entering service for the first time in a Louisiana Public School System. The program has two basic purposes:

- 1) It is the purpose of the Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program to provide new teaching employees of the public school systems in this state with a planned program of leadership and support from experienced educators during the most formative stages of a teacher's experience in Louisiana schools.
- 2) It is further the purpose of the Assistance and Assessment Program to provide assurance to the state, prior to the issuance of a permanent Louisiana teacher certificate, that the new teaching employee demonstrates competency in the understanding and use of the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, determined by the state to be the basis for effective professional performance. These Components of Effective Teaching are the basis of the assessment criteria.

To accomplish the first purpose, data regarding the new teacher's strengths and weaknesses will be collected during the first year by the mentor or mentor support team and the principal, and a professional development plan will be designed, which when implemented can lead to improvement. In addition, each new teacher shall be provided the services of a mentor or mentor support team who will lead professional development activities designed to enhance teacher competencies found to be essential to student learning.

1. What are the responsibilities of a mentor?

A mentor is an experienced teacher who has accepted the opportunity to enhance the training and professional development of a new teacher in the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program. The mentor teacher plays a vital role in getting the new teacher ready to be an effective teacher. The State Teacher Assistance and Assessment process is a means/vehicle to enable the new teacher to become effective. It must be stressed that although the mentor has successfully completed the assessor training program, she/he **is not an assessor of the new teacher**. The mentor offers the new teacher opportunities to share and to learn with an experienced colleague. The exchange between mentor and new teacher is confidential. The mentoring process is not open-ended. Responsibilities defined for each mentor role tie directly to the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching.

A mentor's formal roles and examples of each are:

1. Coach

- coaches the new teacher in analyzing the instructional process and in determining how well students are learning;
- coaches the new teacher in expanding effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessment techniques;
- conducts advisory interviews and observations with feedback using the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching.

2. Model

- demonstrates effective planning, instruction, and adjustment of instruction based on content knowledge;
- guides management of professional responsibilities;
- provides encouragement and support.

3. Professional Development Specialist

- helps the new teacher in analyzing and resolving problems;
- directs the new teacher to needed assistance and resources;
- confers with the new teacher and principal to formulate a formal Professional Development Plan for the new teacher and revises it as needed during the first year of assistance;

- assists the new teacher in analyzing student performance data and student records to plan instruction consistent with student needs and the school improvement plan;
- assists the new teacher in exploring a variety of methods to obtain representative samples of student work.

2. How will a new teacher benefit from the mentoring program?

A mentor teacher plays a vital role in the professional development of the new teacher. While the new teacher develops competence in the complex art and science of teaching, the mentor or mentor support team provides professional support and collegiality. Among the benefits the new teacher will receive are:

- feedback regarding planning, classroom, and instructional strategies;
- an in-depth understanding of the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program;
- additional in-classroom observations with feedback in relation to the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching;
- positive attention, support, and encouragement;
- reassurance that she/he is developing professionally.

3. Who can be a mentor? What are the qualifications to be a mentor?

Teachers selected to serve as mentors should have the following qualifications:

- a permanent Louisiana teaching certificate and a minimum of three years of teaching experience;
- a minimum of one complete year of experience in the school system where the individual will serve as a mentor;
- evidence of excellence in teaching;
- evidence of continuing professional development;
- the ability to model effective instruction and to communicate effectively;
- successful completion of the Louisiana Teacher Assessor and Mentor Training Programs;
- willingness to be observed in the classroom.

4. What is a mentor support team?

A mentor support team is a group of educators led by a teacher of record who has completed the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Training Programs (i.e., Assessor and Mentor Training). A mentor support team shall support no more than five new teachers at a time.

5. Who can serve as a member of a mentor support team?

A mentor support team may be composed of

- a trained mentor, including full or part-time teachers, resource teachers, subject area coordinators, teachers on special assignment, teachers on leave or sabbatical, Regional Education Service Center coordinators with appropriate experiences, and retired teachers who have been retired no more than five years prior to becoming a member of the mentor support team;
- a principal or other administrator;
- one or more members who may not have attended Mentor Training, but who can offer special expertise such as subject area specialists or key resource teachers (team members need not be in the same building as the new teacher);
- a new teacher who has successfully completed the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program.

6. Who is the team leader of the mentor support team?

The mentor support team leader is the teacher of record responsible for reporting placement information and for planning mentor team activities to ensure a full, enriching, and coordinated educational experience for the new teacher.

7. What guidelines should be followed in making mentor assignments?

Local school systems should adhere as closely as possible to the following recommended considerations in assigning new teachers with mentors or mentor support teams.

- Mentors and new teachers should be matched by grade level and subject areas, if at all possible; at minimum, regular education teachers should be paired, and special education teachers should be paired. They should be accessible to the new teacher (teach in the same building or have flexible schedules).
- A mentor teacher who is teaching full-time should be assigned no more than one new teacher to mentor, unless he/she willingly accepts a second new teacher. The maximum assignment of new teachers to a full-time teacher is two. However, this does not preclude a teacher serving as a mentor also serving on an assessment team for a different new teacher than the one(s) he/she mentors, if he/she is willing to do so.
- A teacher can be assigned as a mentor to several new teachers as a full-time or part-time responsibility. Or, as indicated above, a teacher can remain in the classroom, serving as a mentor to one or two new teachers as an additional responsibility.
- Unless the school system already has another procedure in place, the building principal will make the mentor assignment for the new teacher.
- A teacher who is employed as a full-time mentor may serve in that position for no more than three years consecutively. A full-time teacher who mentors one or two new teachers as an additional responsibility is not subject to this provision.
- A mentor support team shall be assigned no more than five new teachers to mentor.

8. How are mentors or mentor support team members compensated?

Beginning school year 2001-2002 noncompetitive grant allocations are available for every school system. Compensation for educators who serve as mentors or members of a mentor support team is established by the local school system. Questions about payment schedules or methods of payments should be channeled to the LEA Contact Person for the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program at the employing school district.

9. How will mentors be trained? What skills and abilities will be developed?

Representatives from local school districts serve as Mentor Trainers. They plan, schedule, and conduct Mentor Training in their district as needed. Information pertinent to school district training should be available through the local central office or LEA Contact Person. Experienced teachers who are trained as assessors can participate in a three-day mentor training which covers both knowledge and skills. The knowledge component includes several parts: information about teacher development and predictable problems of beginning teachers, an understanding of the first steps a beginning teacher must take, and information about specific mentoring roles and activities. Additional areas that will be presented include: the focused coaching cycle, conferencing, observing techniques, data analysis of criterion and norm referenced tests, classroom management, and effective teaching strategies.

10. What are the principal's responsibilities?

Principal responsibilities in the mentoring program include the following:

- introducing the new teacher to school and system policies and procedures, to faculty and staff, to teaching responsibilities, to the school improvement plan, to the school accountability program, to the availability of district resources, and to the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program;
- assisting the new teacher and mentor or support team in arranging necessary coverage in his or her class for classroom observation purposes;
- ensuring that new teachers and their mentors or support team members meet weekly and observe each other's classrooms on at least eight occasions during the first year of the Assistance Program. (For those new teachers who are on an alternate route to certification, the principal may find it necessary to provide additional opportunities for classroom observations.)
- facilitating new teacher/mentor meetings and interactions through appropriate scheduling of classes and daily activities;
- conducting at least one structured interview and one observation during the teacher's second semester of assistance and sharing feedback on his/her performance;
- working with the new teacher and mentor or support team members to create and revise as needed, a formal professional development plan during the teacher's first year;
- serving as the leader of the assessor team that will visit the new teacher during his/her third semester;
- assisting the mentor and new teacher in securing necessary resources for the completion of professional development activities;
- assigning mentors or mentor support team members, monitoring their activity, and evaluating mentor performance.

11. What is the relationship between the mentor and the principal?

The mentor or members of the mentor support team will confer with the new teacher and principal with respect to setting up a Professional Development Plan for the new teacher to grow professionally in the second semester of the Assistance Period. The principal will work with the mentor or mentor support team to identify ways for the mentor and new teacher to have common planning times and to facilitate opportunities for classroom observations.

12. What are the new teacher's responsibilities?

The new teacher has the following responsibilities:

- to perform new teacher responsibilities in accordance with the policies set forth in *Bulletin 1943: Policies and Procedures for Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment, Revised 2001*;
- to meet regularly with her/his mentor or mentor support team at agreed upon times;
- to take responsibility for his/her own professional growth and completion of activities agreed upon with the mentor or mentor support team.

13. Are teachers who are participating in the Practitioner Teacher Program required to participate in the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program?

Teachers who are participating in the Practitioner Teacher Program must successfully complete all requirements for the Practitioner Teacher Program (which includes successful completion of the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program and passing scores on the PRAXIS in the specialty areas) and teach for a total of three years.

At the September 2001 State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting, the notice of intent regarding the policy effecting the reassessment of teachers participating in the Practitioner Teacher Program was approved. The policy stipulates that a decision about the reassessment of teachers who completed the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program prior to participation in the Practitioner Teacher Program be made at the conclusion of the first year of mentoring. At the conclusion of the first year of mentoring, the Assistance Team (a program provider representative, mentor, and principal/designee) shall meet to determine if the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching are still being exhibited by the teacher at the "competent" level. If the team agrees unanimously that the teacher is providing competent instruction reflective of the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, the teacher may be exempted from repeating the Assessment part of the Assistance and Assessment Program.

