Mentoring New Teachers Virtually

edutopia.org/article/mentoring-new-teachers-virtually

New Teachers

Experienced and new teachers shared what they learned in the spring about how to make mentoring work during the pandemic.

By [Alan Neville](#), [Janeen Outka](#)
November 10, 2020

Drazen_ / iStock

Following the school shutdowns in March 2020 due to the global pandemic, participants in a statewide mentoring program in South Dakota had to use innovative strategies to support the transition to virtual teaching and learning.

Prior to the shutdowns, most mentors and new teachers had met face-to-face for collaboration and support, and we surveyed 113 mentors and 217 new teachers in the program to identify the virtual mentoring strategies they were using instead. We found out what mentors and new teachers were learning from each other in order to deliver high-quality virtual instruction.

Using Technology for Instruction and Feedback

Mentors used Zoom and Google Classroom to observe new teachers as they taught live lessons and to provide feedback. "My new teacher added me as a student to her Google Classroom, so I was able to conduct classroom visits and offer feedback from the students' perspective," one mentor teacher told us.

Other pairs of mentors and new teachers became co-teachers in each other's Google classrooms. Some of these virtual co-teaching teams created interdisciplinary projects for their students to do together, others focused on small group instruction and interventions, and a few used Loom and Screencastify to record co-teaching videos for online instruction.

Mentors introduced new teachers to new technology tools. One new teacher told us that

having her mentor show her how to use a Doodle calendar for students to set up one-on-one Zoom sessions was "the single most useful tool I've used in distance learning." In a music classroom, mentors demonstrated how SmartMusic and Flipgrid could support virtual music education and provided strategies for using Zoom to conduct choir and band auditions.

Mentors helped new teachers modify traditional assignments for the virtual learning environment and create self-grading assessments in Google Classroom so that students could receive immediate feedback during asynchronous learning.

Virtual Collaboration

Mentors and new teachers turned to technology for virtual collaboration, including using Google Drive folders to house shared resources, setting up virtual lesson planning sessions, and participating together in online professional development opportunities to learn about virtual learning strategies.

New teachers shared numerous examples of how virtual collaboration supported their instruction. New special education teachers reported collaborating with mentors on how to navigate online special education paperwork, including progress monitoring and individualized education programs (IEPs).

Art and physical education teachers collaborated to create Bingo cards with simple, standards-based activities that were not dependent on equipment for students to complete during at-home learning when devices and internet access were not available. New language arts teachers reported that their mentors helped them connect with colleagues to have weekly Zoom lesson-planning sessions.

This was especially important immediately following the school shutdowns, as teachers needed to both prepare for virtual instruction and create pencil-and-paper materials to be delivered to students whose families did not have internet access or devices.

Connecting With Students and Families

An overwhelming theme that new teachers discussed was the importance of connecting with students and families to keep them engaged in learning. New teachers told us that mentor teachers had offered many practical strategies in communicating with families. "My mentor helped me create parameters for virtual learning, so we developed a virtual parent contract and Smore newsletter, and used Class Dojo to maintain communication. These are free resources that work well with many devices."

Both mentors and new teachers reported using the Remind app to communicate with families via text or email. Mentors also helped new teachers show families how to use the Google Read Aloud extension and voice dictation tools to facilitate at-home learning.

One mentor–new teacher pair used Google Classroom to set up flex-learning time to accommodate the needs of families with multiple students and a limited number of devices in the home. And one new teacher told us, "I still struggled with communicating with families, so my mentor helped me create scripts for phone calls and video sessions and modeled how to use Google Hangouts to speak directly to my students and their families for both instruction and conferences."

Virtual mentoring has many benefits. Mentors and new teachers reported that virtual mentoring saved time and allowed flexibility in scheduling meeting times. This allowed the pairs to meet more frequently, which prompted them to connect, respond, and share resources more often. Virtual mentoring also eliminated driving time for mentor pairs teaching in separate buildings or separate districts, which resulted in more time spent mentoring.

Finally, the virtual environment for teaching and mentoring enhanced the reciprocal relationship between mentors and new teachers, as new teachers shared their technology expertise with the mentors.

As the pandemic continues to impact teaching, new teachers now more than ever need a mentor to support them as they deliver high-quality instruction in all its possible forms. Both new and returning teachers can benefit from the support and collaboration that virtual mentoring programs can provide, and these programs should be supported as much as possible.