

## FROM THE FIELD

# Perspectives on Effective Mentor Teachers

## Being a Mentor Teacher

**By Matthew Rotherham**

Elementary teacher, Bakersfield City School District

It has been a wonderful experience to work with the Kern Urban Teacher Residency program in Bakersfield. I have learned just as much from my residents about how to improve my teaching practices as I hope they have learned from me. I have learned that as a mentor, you have to be open to new experiences when you share your classroom with another. Doing this really brings new perspective to the teaching profession.

Kern Urban Teacher Residency is a partnership between my district, the Bakersfield City School District, and our cooperating university partner, California State University, Bakersfield. This team, along with mentor teachers like myself, work to prepare teacher candidates to be classroom-ready on day one through thoughtful observations and meaningful, bite-sized feedback. To do this, the district provides mentors with bi-weekly coaching using the Charlotte Danielson Framework. Mentors review and examine each domain: planning, classroom environment, responsibilities, and instruction. Each mentor measures a resident's proficiency in those domains and supports this ranking through written, anecdotal accounts from our observation of their instruction. The goal is to support candidates' growth through pinpointed next steps. After a formal lesson is complete, I sit down with my resident to discuss what went well and what areas could use improvement.

My resident also observes me throughout the day. I ask her to write at least five questions she would like me to answer about my practice. These may be about a student, the school, teaching techniques, or any classroom situation that might arise. At the end of each day, we sit down and go over the questions. A lot of the time I have her try to answer the

questions before I give my answer. I believe this helps her think about how she would handle things in her own classroom. Most importantly, this gives her confidence.

I know how important it is to have that confidence. I started teaching when I was 21, and this is my 24th year in the classroom. It is my life's work. This residency is a great community for learning. We need good, qualified teachers and this program is a great stepping stone for preparing them.

## California State University, Stanislaus On Mentor Teacher Professional Development

**By Anne W. Weisenberg and Noelle Won**

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At CSU Stanislaus, our goal is to create meaningful and actionable professional development opportunities for mentor teachers to support their work with teacher candidates, and, ultimately, to impact student achievement. To achieve this goal, we take a three-pronged approach to mentor development. First, we clearly articulate the instructional skills-content and pedagogy—that mentors must prioritize in their work with teacher candidates. Secondly, we ensure our mentors have the coaching strategies they need to provide effective, evidence-based feedback to candidates. Finally, we encourage mentors and candidates to use the co-teaching structure to optimize the clinically-oriented teacher preparation experience.

Our team and partners from the University of Washington facilitated a new growth and evaluation tool for teacher candidates called the 5D+ Rubric. This helped establish a common language for the necessary teacher educator skills that are prioritized for candidates. Training practitioners on this rubric also provided them opportunities to engage in conversations

that create a shared vision for the future of teacher education and greater camaraderie in our teaching community.

Additionally, the university hosts after-school “Co-teaching Overview with Meet and Greet” at the beginning of each semester for each district that include university supervisors, teacher candidates, and mentor teachers. To ensure the success of the co-teaching model, two 30-minute mentor support meetings are scheduled during the semester, enabling the university supervisor to check the co-teaching responsibilities

and communicate goals for the student teacher’s growth.

Two of our partner districts have well established these supports for mentor teachers. To build on this system and increase our reach in the region, we are working to create and use web-based training modules. We are excited about the progress of our mentor teachers and realize that they are key to strengthening the clinical practice of our teacher candidates and to preparing them to be ready for their own classrooms from day one.



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