



## Empower and Inspire Mentor Teachers Through Professional Learning

*Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Links to Resources*

[The National Center for Teacher Residencies](#) (NCTR) hosted a webinar on January 22, 2026, the second webinar in our Transforming Educator Preparation Webinar series. Webinar attendees had the opportunity to learn how investing in mentor teachers results in a more skilled workforce and better learning environments for students. We spent time examining how the role of the mentor teacher is situated within a larger system of teacher preparation and the mentor role as a key impact point for achieving district, educator preparation program, Department of Labor, and state education agency goals. Our expert panel, listed below, shared insights describing best and promising practices to leverage, engage, and support mentor teachers based on their role in the educator preparation system.

- **Ann Akens**, 4th Grade Dual Language, Teacher and Mentor, Clarendon School, Osborn School District
- **Ericka Francois**, 3rd Grade Teacher and Mentor, Pleasantdale Elementary, IGNITE DeKalb Teacher Residency, DeKalb County Public Schools
- **Elizabeth Hearn**, Director of Programs, the National Center for Teacher Residencies
- **Bailey Rager**, 3rd Grade Master Teacher and Mentor, Enlace Academy, Neighborhood Charter Network
- **Ashley Vierra**, Program Manager, IGNITE DeKalb Teacher Residency, DeKalb County Public Schools
- **Dr. Karen Wright**, Director of Residencies and Clinical Experiences, Marian University

*NOTE: The content and resources NCTR shares should not be considered as an endorsement nor legal guidance. Please consult your own legal counsel for any guidance you may need.*

## FAQs from the Webinar

**Question:** Can you share the PowerPoint from the webinar?

**Answer:** Sure, we are happy to share the Empower and Inspire Mentor Teachers through Mentor Professional Learning PowerPoint [linked here](#). Please reach out to us to inquire about other resources [through our website](#).

**Question:** What does the mentor role look like in a teacher residency model?

**Answer:** Great question! For almost two decades, NCTR has supported teacher residency programs and now registered teacher apprenticeships to recruit, develop, and retain mentor teachers. It is important to recognize that mentor teachers or journeyworkers play a key role in directing the aspiring teachers' P-12 classroom-based learning experiences. The teacher resident or apprentice is not a teacher of record or fully responsible for student learning; they teach and learn full-time or almost full-time alongside the mentor teacher for a full academic year. The mentor teacher is responsible for providing coherent and deliberate learning experiences where the mentor teacher sets goals, models effective teaching practices, deconstructs their practice with the teacher resident or apprentice, co-plans using district and state instructional resources and student data, co-teaches to meet the P-12 students' needs, and coaches the teacher resident using student and teacher observation data to provide actionable feedback. [Click here](#) to meet with NCTR and learn more about NCTR's teacher residency model and the role of the mentor teacher.

**Question:** What does mentor professional learning look like, and what do mentors learn?

**Answer:** The mentor teacher, in NCTR's teacher residency or apprenticeship model, participates in systematic professional learning. Most programs provide a hybrid of in-person or virtual support on a monthly basis. The goals for the professional learning are to ensure mentor teachers:

- have clarity around their role and the related responsibilities;
- understand the processes and protocols required to be an effective mentor teacher;
- have the resources they need to support a teacher resident or apprentice to become day-one-ready teachers;

- deepen connections and build community across a mentor teacher cohort;
- examine and set teacher resident or apprentice learning goals driven by the educator preparation program, crosswalked with the district teacher effectiveness framework, and teacher resident or apprentice development;
- learn about, develop, and practice coaching strategies and skills that will strengthen the mentor teacher's ability to build trusting relationships with the teacher resident or apprentice and provide developmentally appropriate, actionable feedback for the teacher resident; and
- examine teacher resident or apprentice data to evaluate progress and plan teacher resident or apprentice learning experiences and coaching sessions.

To read more about mentor professional learning, please find NCTR's [\*Reimagining Mentor Professional Learning for Teacher Residency Programs\*](#) paper.

**Question:** Can you share the four practices that you identified are core to the design and implementation of mentor teacher professional learning?

**Answer:** The four promising practices described in the webinar are informed by the work of Linda Darling-Hammond (2017) and Zaretta Hammond (2020), both of whom offer research-based guidance on creating impactful learning environments for adults. These practices are further supported by data from our Mentor Professional Learning Collaborative, as well as extensive findings from professional learning initiatives across the NCTR Network.

### **Practice 1: Intentionally Shape a Culture of Learning**

Effective mentor teachers engage in self-reflection, work through conflict and tensions constructively, facilitate robust learning experiences for teacher residents, and navigate complex systems. Given the complexity and vulnerability these and other tasks require, it is essential to intentionally cultivate a supportive learning culture where mentor teachers come together primarily as learners.

### **Practice 2: Center Active Learning and Reflection**

Effective professional learning is built around ongoing, iterative cycles of active engagement. When mentor teachers engage in structured cycles of action, feedback, and reflection, they are better able to internalize new mindsets and approaches, notice and name their growth areas, and make intentional, lasting shifts in their practice.



Creating space for this kind of reflective learning not only deepens mentors' understanding of their own teaching but also strengthens their ability to model critical reflection and continuous improvement for the teacher residents or apprentices they support.

### **Practice 3: Utilize Models**

When mentor teachers are learning new skills, clear models can powerfully illustrate what effective mentoring looks and sounds like in practice. These might include videos of instruction or coaching, mentor reflections, protocol demonstrations, completed tools, or case studies highlighting real mentoring decisions. To maximize mentor learning, the models should be paired with sense-making structures—such as guided reflection, peer discussion, or observation tools—that help mentor teachers connect the model to their own practice.

### **Practice 4: Provide In-Field Coaching**

Because mentoring happens in real-time, in real classrooms, mentor teachers need support on-site—while they are actively working with teacher residents or apprentices and students. In-field coaching, where program leaders provide real-time support and feedback, is a powerful tool for accelerating mentor teacher growth.

To read more about the practices included in effective mentor professional learning, please find NCTR's [\*Reimagining Mentor Professional Learning for Teacher Residency Programs\*](#) paper.

**Question:** Do the mentor teachers receive additional pay for their role? If so, how is that funded?

**Answer:** Yes, we recommend that mentor teachers be paid a stipend for their role and increased responsibilities. Title II monies are a recommended source of funds for the stipend.

## **For More Information**

Please visit [NCTR's website](#) to learn more about how to recruit, develop and retain mentor teachers or journeyworkers. Please reach out to Jill Pitner at [jpitner@nctresidencies.org](mailto:jpitner@nctresidencies.org); she will gladly support your other inquiries and connect you to more resources.



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