NATIONAL CENTER FOR TEACHER RESIDENCIES

High-Quality Mentor Professional Learning

Metro-Atlanta P-20 Collaborative

Mentoring aspiring teachers requires a distinct set of skills and intentional professional learning. Below are excerpts from the National Center for Teacher Residencies' (NCTR) report, *Mentor Teachers Matter: Strengthening Professional Learning Improves Teacher Quality and Retention* (NCTR, August 2026). The full report includes the data, promising practices, and content curriculum that is strengthening mentor teacher practice and leading to high-quality learning experiences for aspiring teachers.

Promising Practices for Facilitators: NCTR's curriculum is organized around four foundational practices that create the conditions for mentor teachers to engage deeply in learning, apply new skills, reflect on and refine their practice, and excel in their role.

Practice 1: Intentionally Shape a Culture of Learning
When professional learning honors teachers' experiences, perspectives, and expertise, it creates the trust and psychological safety needed for mentor teachers to take on challenges, reflect on their practice, and experiment with new approaches, mirroring the exact same conditions we expect mentors to create for aspiring teachers.

Practice 2: Center Active Learning and Reflection
Effective professional learning relies on cycles of action, feedback, and reflection. These cycles help mentor teachers internalize new mindsets, notice growth areas, and make intentional, lasting shifts in practice.

Practice 3: Utilize Models
Videos, protocol demonstrations, completed tools, and case studies show mentor teachers what effective mentoring looks and sounds like. Paired with guided reflection and peer discussion, models help mentor teachers connect high-leverage practices to their own work.

Practice 4: Provide In-Field Coaching
Because mentoring happens in real classrooms in real time, mentor teachers benefit from immediate support and feedback from program leaders. This in-field coaching builds trust, encourages risk-taking, and bridges the gap between theory and practice.

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Content Areas: Mentor professional learning incorporates the content below to build the distinct skills of observing, co-planning, giving strategic feedback, leading reflective conversations, and guiding aspiring teachers through the complexities of a school setting.

Content Area 1: Orienting to the role and its responsibilities

- Understand the roles and requirements of mentors and aspiring teachers
- Learn the prioritized pedagogical practices of the educator preparation program system

Content Area 2: Relationship-building between mentor teacher and aspiring teachers

- Plan opening experiences with empathy and build healthy, trusting partnerships
- Practice and model active listening, emotional self-awareness, and self-regulation

Content Area 3: Modeling, co-planning, co-teaching, and feedback on instruction

- Make pedagogical practices transparent through modeling and collaborative planning
- Use co-teaching and coaching to build knowledge and comfort with public practice

Content Area 4: Adult learning theory

- Foster aspiring teacher agency, self-direction, and independent problem-solving
- Engage in difficult conversations and build navigational capital

Content Area 5: Systematic skill building and refinement

- Use observation cycles with low-inference data to support development
- Bridge connections between course curriculum and PK-12 clinical experiences

Content Area 6: Preparing to become a professional educator

- Connect aspiring teachers with building leadership
- Ensure successful program completion, certification, and hiring

Visit NCTR's website to access more resources and tools!
www.nctresidencies.org

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