



8 Tips for Starting and Strengthening CFES Mentoring Programs

1. Start small but get started. Bridport Central School (VT) started with a college mentoring program, but over time their mentoring program expanded to include community members, parents, teachers and staff, and peers. Now it is huge!

It's fine to dream big and have lofty mentoring goals, but don't get caught thinking you need to have the perfect program set in stone before the program begins. Mentors will quickly lose interest in mentoring if too much time passes between signing up and starting. Get started now; it is easier to make adjustments along the way.

2. Keep it simple. Elaborate planning doesn't make a better, more effective program. Have a clear focus and purpose. The better others understand the program, the easier it will be to get their support.

Can't find time in the school schedule for peer mentoring? Try lunchtime or recess, or use down times in the day. Peer mentors have dining clubs, lead games and activities at recess, and head breakfast book clubs and homework help sessions during nonacademic times. Scholars are great at coming up with these ideas.

3. Design mentoring that engages other CFES core practices. Give mentoring purpose. Don't think of mentoring as an "add-on." Mentoring can make life easier! At Hopkins Hill Elementary (RI), for example, peer and college mentors enhance the school's Math Masters program (Hopkins Hill discovered Math Masters several years ago while networking at the National Conference). College visits, goal setting, and leadership through service at this Rhode Island K-5 school are also aligned with Math Masters. The core practices are the vehicle. At Hopkins Hill, everyone comes out a winner!

4. Remember your uniqueness. What works for others may not work for you. Although it is helpful to look at what other schools are doing, it is just as important to build on your own assets. It can be easy to have excuses as to why something is impossible for you to do, but appears easy for others. Avoid that trap. A year from now, other schools and colleges will be looking at your program, yearning to create what you have! So look, but don't let anything limit your possibilities. When it comes to creating mentoring programs, attitude is everything!

No doubt that Charlestown High School (MA) was looking at their assets when they created a unique mentoring program. Recent graduate TCP Scholars (now in college) mentor current Charlestown TCP Scholars.

5. Be persistent and patient. If something is not working, approach it from a different angle, find out on what level it will work, and go from there. The Citadel and John's Island Schools (SC) took a different angle when they designed their mentoring program. Since

Citadel Cadets can only leave campus once a month, and it was difficult for the TCP Scholars to miss classes for mentoring, the school-college partners became creative by holding the mentoring program at The Citadel on Saturdays. This way parents are able to participate and students get to enjoy time on the college campus with their mentors.

If someone is reluctant to become involved, try to find out on what level they will commit. For example, start a relationship with a new college where you want to recruit mentors. Then build the relationship through smaller projects, such as college visits or an Early College Awareness Week activity, and go from there (remember tip #1: start small). The relationship with the college will grow, college students will become hooked, and trust will be established with college personnel. Often it is the college that offers more to the school, because college folks have had a chance to learn during this period!

6. Think “win-win.” Mentors, students, and teachers need a reason to be involved: their needs must be met at some level. For instance, a reluctant teacher who would like writing help for her young students might welcome peer mentors when the teacher sees that peer mentors can serve as project assistants; college students are motivated when a flexible schedule can meet their time constraints or when it can tie into college credit. Tap into the interests and passions of others to help move mentoring along.

Endicott College and Saltonstall Elementary School (MA) have done just that. Endicott students mentor biweekly for one hour. College students who cannot commit traditional mentoring but want to be involved, are connected to Scholars through letter writing. Having different levels of involvement lets more college students participate in the program and gives the Scholars more ways to connect with college students.

7. Broadcast success and achievements. Instead of waiting until the end of the school year, start now. Pownal Elementary School (VT) PAW Pals program with Williams College hit the front page of the local paper at their kick-off event (hint: cake, balloons, and great photos can't hurt). Through newspaper articles, letters to the editor, the school newsletter, and the college newspaper, good news spreads and everyone will want to become involved. Spread the good news early; create a buzz in the halls.

8. Prepare mentors. Mentors need to know what is expected of them and what they can expect from mentoring. Mentor training is a must. The CFES Mentoring Handbook can be found in the members section of the CFES website at www.fesnet.org. There is a section in the handbook that covers items to include during the training sessions.

Mentors appreciate it when schools like Oak Grove (VT) create special mentor folders that include pertinent information and serve as a welcome kit. Cocoa High School (FL) makes sure each mentor has a copy of the school handbook.

Having the calendar set before the training begins lets mentors know if they can realistically commit to the program. This is much better than letting down Scholars later. Start the calendar by establishing program kick-off and wrap-up dates. Remember that school and college calendars differ. Once the start and finish dates are established, look at times for a celebration, mentor check-in meetings, etc. These check-ins serve as ongoing mentor training and are critical to keeping a program running smoothly.