

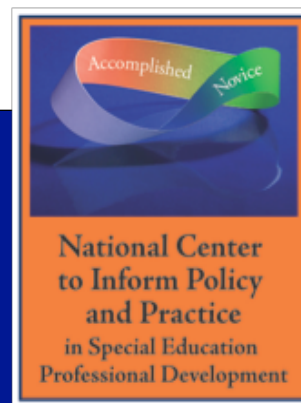
## Olathe School District

### Overview

The Olathe National Education Association in collaboration with Olathe Unified School District (OUSD) developed the Great Beginnings New Educator Induction Program in 2001. The program is based on several coaching models and uses resources from the New Teacher Center to implement multi-leveled mentoring. District-based Instructional Resource Teachers (IRT) work with building level mentors to support beginning special education teachers. On-going professional development, specific to special education, for both the beginners and mentors ensure continuous learning assessed through a standards-based evaluation.

### *What makes Olathe tick?*

- Multi-layered support
  - ~ Full-time district level mentors
  - ~ Building level mentors
- Ongoing professional development for mentors and mentees specific to special education
- Adequate and stable funding
- Standards based evaluation system
  - ~ Feedback based on district educator standards, indicators, and rubrics
  - ~ Professional development aligned to district educator standards
  - ~ Collaboration between administrators and mentors



*We are getting new educators up to speed quickly and their success is impacting the success of our students. We are retaining great teachers due to the system of support.*

*We see such amazing growth in the beginners who were struggling.*

-Program Director



## Program Rationale

OUSD believes that “mentoring helps create a culture for learning by sharing clearly articulated, commonly held beliefs on student learning and professional growth.” In response to difficulty retaining high quality beginning teachers, OUSD created a program that would support beginning teacher professional growth and encourage beginners to remain in teaching. The district also hoped to use induction support to reinforce shared beliefs about instructional practices, curriculum, management, policies and procedures, and professional development.

## District Context

The population of Olathe, a suburb of Kansas City, has quadrupled since 1950, so that now OUSD is the fourth largest city in the state. The district currently includes 33 elementary schools, 8 junior highs, 4 senior highs, and 2 early childhood learning centers. The student population is primarily Caucasian (76.6%), Hispanic, (9.4%) and African-American students (5.6%). Approximately 20% of students and families live in poverty and receive free or reduced lunch. Fifteen percent of Olathe students receive special education services (12% disability and 3% gifted). OUSD boasts of graduation rates of approximately 95%.

## Program Goal

The Great Beginnings New Educator Induction Program is designed to address three goals. First, it seeks to improve the capacity of the OUSD to attract, induct, and retain high performing special education teachers. Second, the program seeks to ensure that Olathe educators know district expectations and curriculum, and can implement key instructional strategies. Finally, the program looks to ensure the success of beginning special educators and ultimately their students.

## Components

The foundation of the Olathe program is the multifaceted approach to beginning teacher support. Olathe provides all beginning teachers with an instructional resource teacher (IRT) during their first year of teaching. Beginning teachers are observed by IRTs at least three times per quarter, in addition to at least ten consultation meetings throughout the year. Beginning teachers are also provided either a collegial mentor (CM) or an orientation partner (OP), depending on their experience. CMs are provided to beginning teachers who have never held a contract in another district, while OPs work with beginning teachers who have experience in other districts.

Professional development is another essential component of the Great Beginnings program. Both IRTs and mentees are required to attend professional development to increase their pedagogical and mentoring knowledge. All observations and appraisals are based on the Standards Based Evaluation System put in place by OUSD. Both feedback and professional development are aligned with the standards, indicators, and rubrics provided by IRTs during observations. OUSD also maintains a partnership with Emporia State University to provide teachers with an online Master’s degree program.

## Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs)

IRTs work as full-time mentors. They are paid a teacher salary, but are contracted three additional weeks before the school year begins and three weeks after the school year ends. They provide structured, individualized contact with beginning teachers, and collaborate to design professional development opportunities targeted to beginners’ needs. IRTs are responsible for assisting beginning teachers with a variety of issues. They work with all first year teachers and some second year teachers who are granted exceptions. Exceptions may be granted when teachers change positions, schools, or grade assignment.



## **IRT Hiring & Selection**

The IRT selection process is extremely competitive, and applicants must complete a presentation and participate in two interviews. IRT selection is conducted by a committee that includes the program coordinator, two IRTs, the school improvement director, and the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum. Special education IRTs must be master educators, have good communication skills, a special education certificate, knowledge of special education policies and procedures, effective instructional practices, and disability areas. Beginning special educators are matched to IRTs first by area of disability expertise and then by experience with primary or secondary students.

## **IRT Training**

IRTs are provided with extensive training. They are assigned an experienced IRT who is responsible for training in district procedures and coaching skills. IRTs also meet for approximately 3 hours per month to discuss issues associated with beginning teacher mentoring, and new IRTs attend bimonthly training to refine their coaching and mentoring skills. The district gives each new IRT a mentoring manual, which includes basic information about their roles and responsibilities.

## **IRT Mentoring Sessions**

IRTs are responsible for observing, evaluating, and providing feedback to no more than 15 beginning teachers. Observations are preceded by a formal consultation and followed by a formal feedback session. At least 10 consultation sessions are provided throughout the year, depending on teacher need. All feedback and appraisal is based on the District Educator Standards, Indicators, and Rubrics. While IRTs do not make formal decisions regarding contract renewal, one of their observation forms remains in the beginning teacher's file and is factored into decisions to rehire.

IRT contact with beginning teachers focuses on pedagogy and good classroom instruction. Topics of mentoring conversations include collaborating with general education staff, developing and conducting IEP meetings, accessing necessary resources, training paraeducators, answering procedural questions, and providing emotional and instructional support. In addition, IRTs provide beginning teachers with monthly email newsletters that include reminders of tasks due and tips for beginners. Throughout the year, IRTs maintain contact with beginning teachers through email, phone calls, and face-to-face contact. IRTs maintain collaborative coaching logs to keep track of their communication with beginners.

## **Communication with Administrators**

Communication between the beginning teacher and IRTs is confidential during the beginning teacher's first quarter. In the second quarter, there is open dialogue between the administrator and the IRT. Beginning teachers are brought into this dialogue as much as possible to maintain an open flow of communication.

*My IRT helped me with alternative assessments for kids in the lowest 1%. I had no idea how to do that. She showed me what to do, gave me ideas about the kinds of materials to use.*

**-Beginning Teacher**



*It was exciting to know that I had strategies to use that I know would work.*

## -Beginning Teacher



### Building Level Mentors

Building level mentors can be a Collegial Mentor or an Orientation Mentor depending upon the experience of their mentee. Building mentors provide support to all new hires. Building mentors are assigned by building administrators or special education facilitators, but building principals have a strong influence over selection of building level mentors.

### Hiring Building Level Mentors

Like IRTs, building mentors are considered master educators in their fields. They are also identified as leaders in their building. They are required to have at least 3 years of experience in the district before they fill out a mentoring application.

### Matching Building Level Mentors with Mentees

Building mentors are matched with mentees based on similarity of location and teaching assignment. Beginning special education teachers are always assigned a special education building mentor. Mentors are assigned a maximum of two mentees each.

### Mentoring Sessions

During the first semester, topics for mentoring sessions focus on survival, including orientation to the district and building, scheduling procedures, IEPs, and day-to-day assistance. The second semester focuses primarily on reflection. During this period, mentors address mentee's identified strengths and needs.

### Building Mentor Training

Building mentor training occurs throughout the year and differs based on whether the mentor is a *Collegial Mentor* or an *Orientation Partner*. It is strongly recommended that all building level mentors complete the induction series training. Induction series training occurs twice a month and is aligned

with district standards. This training also includes a follow-up component with the IRT.

### Collegial Mentor (CM)

Collegial mentors are assigned to work with first year teachers. Beginning special education teachers are always matched with a special education CM. CMs are required to complete one orientation session and two other professional development courses throughout the year. The first year of the formal mentor relationship, the CM meets individually with mentees for approximately 30 minutes each week. During the second year, meetings occur bi-weekly for approximately 30 minutes. Mentors are required to keep a contact log that details each time they meet with their mentee. CMs are paid \$1,140 annually. The state of Kansas reimburses the district for \$1,000 per beginner.

### Orientation Partner (OP)

Orientation partners are assigned to work with teachers new to the district with prior teaching experience. Special education teachers are matched with special education Ops. Teachers and OPs meet for approximately 30 minutes every other week. OPs are required to complete one orientation session prior to mentoring and also keep a contact log of their time with their mentees. OPs receive \$570 annual





stipend for their mentoring responsibilities. The cost is paid for by the district because the state of Kansas only reimburses for the mentors of first year teachers.

## Professional Development

Professional development is an essential element of the OUSD mentoring program. Both mentors and mentees are required to participate in professional development to increase their depth and breadth of knowledge. Beginning and/or new to the district special educators are involved in a variety of professional development activities, both prior to school beginning and throughout their first year.

Activities for beginning special education teachers are tailored to their specific needs. A new educator before school event is held for 3 full days prior to other faculty returning to school. At this event, presenters address topics such as roles and responsibilities, classroom climate, and management, the special education website. An advanced teaching and learning series is also provided to beginning special educators. This after-school series includes topics to support management and effective instruction. Topics in this series include parent-teacher conferences, writing IEPs, differentiated instruction, the general education/SPED connection, and end of the

year challenges. Beginning special educators also participate in school improvement training, which includes lessons pertaining to specific grade levels and content areas, as well as building professional learning communities (PLC).

Building level mentors are also required to participate in a variety of mentoring strands, including:

- Mentoring 101: The Nuts and Bolts
- Classroom Management for Mentors: Helping Improve the Effectiveness of Your New Educator's Management Skills
- Working Relationships: Helping Your Mentee Work with You and Other Staff
- Advanced Mentoring: Helping New Educators Reflect & Grow

Special education IRTs meet at least twice a month for professional development. The topics are need based. While it is important for them to be exposed to all of the general education material, the district also recognizes the importance of including special education issues into professional development.



## Standards and Evaluation

One key feature of the OUSD Program is the Standards Based Evaluation system. New educators are supported for their first 4 years with this system, and building principals base all feedback and appraisal on the standards, indicators, and rubrics provided by IRTs during their observations. Furthermore, all professional development opportunities and requirements are aligned with these standards. Olathe's five district standards are as follows:

- 1) Educators committed to students and their learning
- 2) Educators know their subject matter and how to teach
- 3) Educators create a climate for learning
- 4) Educators as lifelong learners
- 5) Educators work with various stakeholders.

## Onsite Masters Program

OUSD has partnered with Emporia State University to create an online Master's degree program. The training and support provided through the induction program in the first year at Olathe counts towards the first 10 credit hours of the masters program. The district provides beginning teachers with books in their first year, however, teachers are responsible for the remainder of the costs associated with the program.



## Program Evaluation

To reflect on their continuing progress, beginning teachers complete a survey twice a year, assessing their progress on district standards. The district's human resource office also collects data on the retention of new teachers to determine the program's effectiveness. Surveys are also used to evaluate the training and support provided by the IRTs and building level mentors. New educators respond to various questions about their relationship with their mentors and the training and support they have been provided.

In addition, the district has a no fault divorce clause in which a new educator or a mentor can contact the program coordinator at any time if they are unhappy with their mentor or mentee, and they will be re-assigned.

## Funding and Sustainability

The evaluation of the program and its teachers has consistently shown that the district is retaining higher rates of beginning teachers and having a positive effect on student success and performance. Great Beginnings has been able to sustain adequate and stable funding. The district and administrators have a close collaborative relationship with the NEA and are able to share the research that supports its cost-effectiveness.

## Challenges

Olathe has a strong commitment to overcoming obstacles and challenges facing its induction and mentoring program.

### *Funding*

While the program has been able to sustain consistent funding for mentoring, program leaders recognize that some beginning teachers would benefit from an additional full year of mentoring by an IRT. At this point, IRTs are contracted as full-time mentors for first year teachers only. However, if a teacher changes grade, school, or subject, they may be provided an IRT for an additional year. Unfortunately, even when struggling teachers have been identified, the program has not been able to obtain district funding for a 2 full years of support.

### *IRTs Availability*

Another challenge is related to the availability of IRTs and their ability to fulfill and dedicate their time to multiple roles. In the past few years, OUSD has hired few beginning teachers. IRTs are taking on additional responsibilities related to school improvement. This change in roles has created some struggles with how to manage availability and mentoring with a focus on building improvement.

## Closing

The Great Beginnings program has run continuously in Olathe since 2001. One measure of program success is the high rates of retention for novice teachers. According to 2008-2009 data, Olathe retained 96% of its beginner for a second years. This high level of success has been an important consideration for continuous funding of the program. Those involved with Great Beginnings credit its continuous funding to the fact that "the program works."

The multileveled structure of the Great Beginnings program offers beginners comprehensive support during their first year of teaching. The roles of Instructional Resource Teachers and Building-level Mentors are differentiated and complementary. IRTs conduct formal observations of beginning teachers, provide feedback based on standards, and focus on improving classroom instruction. By contrast, building-based Collegial Mentors meet more frequently with the beginning teachers they mentor and address their more immediate, day-to-day, and pragmatic concerns. Professional development is the third essential element of the Great Beginnings. Novice teachers participate in 3 days of training before the school year begins, and in a series of after-school sessions during the school year.