

Report on ACSA Region 8 Mentor Program, July 29, 2016

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Background and demographics. Since its inception as a pilot program in January 2010, ACSA Region 8's Mentor Program has paired **38** Proteges with **26** Mentors.

Activity in 2015-16 was limited due to several factors:

- Districts having their own support programs, particularly for new Principals,
- Changes in District and ACSA leadership, loss of leaders familiar with, actively supporting, and publicizing the Mentor Program in their districts,
- Proteges taking positions of increased leadership after participating for a few years, feeling comfortable in their roles, and moving to informal touch-base-as-needed relationships with their Mentors,
- Proteges moving out of the area or retiring,
- State ACSA's transition of the Mentor Program, resulting in Region 8's Program "keeping a low profile" until the State direction became clearer, and
- Confidentiality concerns may make Proteges reluctant to promote the Program.

In 2015-16, there were 11 Protégé/Mentor pairs. The Mentors, both retirees and working administrators, are dedicated to helping their Proteges navigate their unique circumstances & challenges.

To highlight the breadth of services to Region 8 ACSA members, between January 2010 and July 2016, Proteges in the following positions were served by Mentors. (If a Protégé changed positions while in the Program, both positions are counted.)

- Assistant Principal or Dean: Elementary - 3, Middle School - 5, High School - 3
- Principal: Elementary - 13, Middle – 1, High - 1; Alternative HS - 1
- Coordinator/Director/Program Specialist: 13
- Alternative Education & ROP: 5
- Teacher: 2
- Assistant Superintendent: 2 (1 out of the area)
- Superintendent: 3 (1 retired)
- Graduate student (in Ed Leadership): 1
- Retired: 5
- Left Program, no contact information available: 3

Since enrolling in the Program,

- 17 Proteges have assumed positions of greater leadership: 2 from Asst. Principal to Principal, 7 from site Principals to District Office positions, 1 from Director to Head of School, 1 from Credential Coordinator to Director of Business Services in another county, 6 from Coordinator/Director positions to Assistant Superintendent & Superintendent. One Protege, while remaining in the same position, took on vast new leadership responsibility as the President of her national professional association!
- 6 have taken lateral positions (2 within the same district, 4 to different districts),
- 3 were relieved of their positions. Of these, one is a Principal in a different district in Region 8, one is a Principal in another county, and one is a teacher.
- 6 have moved out of Region 8.

Protege applicants come from many Region 8 school districts, SCCOE, and MetroEd. In the last three years, the formerly high number of participants from SCCOE has declined to zero as Proteges have taken positions of increasing responsibility in other organizations, and moved out of the area. Most Proteges are self-referred or recommended to the Program by colleagues. Others are encouraged to apply by supervisors, usually ACSA Region 8 leaders who feel that the Program will support their administrators without compromising district supervisory relationships.

Survey responses. This year's Proteges' responses to a **Feedback Survey** sent in June 2016 indicate great satisfaction with the Program. Eleven Proteges have participated in the program for a duration of one to five years as follows: less than one year (1); one year (2); two years (2); three years (3), and five years (3). Per agreement by the Mentors, at this time, the Mentor Program does not impose a time-limit on Proteges' participation. If the number of Proteges increases significantly, this practice will be revisited. Several Proteges who have changed positions and been promoted, value the continuity of working through their new challenges with their Mentors.

Four respondents plan to continue in the Program in 2016-17, one is undecided, and three do not (two of those have moved away). When asked "How helpful has your Mentor been?" six rated their Mentor the highest possible (5, one gave a rating of 6+), and one rated theirs at (3), largely due to difficulty of scheduling meeting time.

Proteges' comments (see Appendix, pp. 3-4) reveal that they have worked through some significant challenges with their Mentors, such as leadership, working successfully with a variety of people, including difficult ones, Special Education issues, and changing jobs. They report many successes, such as improved communication, confidence-building, developing a work plan with colleagues, and successfully opening a new school.

A key measure of the Program's success is that when asked if they would be willing to support a new colleague, 3 replied that they would. This indicates a strong culture of member-to-member support, and recognition of the critical value of experienced administrators helping their less experienced colleagues.

Budget implications. Since inception, the Mentor Program has never used the entire initial \$10,000/year Region 8 allocation. This year, the Program's total cost was \$3,375. Funds are used for Mentor Stipends (\$200/Protege), Protege gifts (\$25 gift card/Protege per year), the Coordinator's stipend (\$1000 in 2015-16, a voluntary reduction due to limited activity), Mentor Training (budgeted at \$500/year, but not done this year), and miscellaneous office supplies & expenses (not requested). If the number of Protege applicants increases considerably in 2016-17, the Region 8 Executive Board will be informed and asked for guidance on whether to limit the Program, use funds differently, or increase the allocation. Communication with Treasurer, Ann Jones, is excellent.

Recommendation. Unlike State ACSA's Mentor Program, which focuses on induction into administration, Region 8's Program is primarily a **career development program**. It seems advisable to continue to monitor and implement Region 8's Mentor Program at a similar level of participation, recruiting and training new Mentors as needed, while successfully coordinating with ACSA's State Mentor Program, the Ambassador Program, and other such relevant supports to ACSA members and school administrators in Region 8.

Appendix (Survey Response Comments)

Comments. In response to “Please list the most important administrative skills you & your Mentor worked on,” Proteges replied:

- Navigating relationships
- Dealing with difficult people
- HR/Staffing
- Resource allocation
- SST/504 plans
- Campus climate & culture
- Site & district politics
- Personnel issues & relationship building
- Managing & supervising staff
- Work load
- Having courageous conversations
- Dashboards
- Groundedness - not rushing decisions but thinking them through
- Always leaving our meetings with an immediate action plan
- Thinking through implications at a broad educational level and at a personal level
- Practicing answering interview questions
- Having a principal/administrative leader” mindset
- Resume & cover letter
- Interview skills
- Networking

In response to “Please describe some **challenges & successes** you & your Mentor worked on,” Proteges replied:

- Dealing with change in leadership
- Learning how to not make it personal
- Recovering from a situation when my leadership capacity was called into question
- Relationship building
- Moving forward, keeping a positive attitude
- Improving interview skills by giving more details for my responses to questions, looking and sounding more confident.
- This year we worked on an HR issue I was having. She helped me tremendously!!!! And, I was able to handle the situation perfectly with a positive outcome.

Additional Comments:

My mentor, xxxxx, has been the perfect support as I transitioned from a school administrator position to a doctorate student. As an ACSA member, this support has been crucial to attaining my professional goals. She has been there for the highs, low, and in-between. At each stage, she has provided the right amount of support while being a great sounding board with next steps.

I personally have to say that the Mentor Program has been the personalized element that has helped me transition from being a teacher to program specialist and from there to my first administrative position. I have been very fortunate to have very strong and caring mentors. All of them, had and have the professional experience and the personal wisdom to care about me and my career path. (note: this Protégé has had 3 different Mentors in 5 years of participation)

My mentor has been an amazing resource for advice, support, and confidence building.

I am grateful that this program is now available in our region. In my previous position, when I asked about mentoring it did not exist- fortunately I was able to connect with someone in a different region at the time. Continuing to advertise that mentoring is available, especially to new admin, is always helpful!

My mentor has been very helpful in guiding me to have courageous conversations on issues that need to bring diverse viewpoints together. I now feel more comfortable to encourage others to share their voices and come to a solution that the entire team can support. I am very grateful for the support from my very experienced, nurturing and kind mentor!

Initially we had more contact due to the issues I was having with my district. After the transition to my new job, we did not contact each other as often. Maybe if we had calendared our check ins we could have kept to those dates. I think our check in time could have been more structured as well and focused on goals.

Proteges' suggestions to help the Mentor Program reach out to serve additional Proteges.

Give some success stories.

[My Mentor] was my Tier II coach, and continuing that relationship was a big part of seeking out this Protégé program. As with all professional development support, you often don't know what you're missing out on until you experience it for yourself. Perhaps tabling at more tier II events and having mentors seated around the room among tier II participants in addition to having it included in the email newsletters for the young and aspiring administrator bulletin that comes out regularly would help.

Refer to the program in the monthly newsletter.

