

HOW TO DEVELOP A MENTORING PROGRAM

1. Initial Planning

Given the important role that mentorship plays in the P-TECH 9-14 school model, the school's planning team should give a great deal of thought to the multitude of ways that a mentoring program can profoundly affect the lives of students. Mentoring in the early years of high school provides a unique kind of career, academic, and personal guidance that teachers, administrators, and guidance staff are either not equipped to do because of their own chosen career paths or because they do not have the time to devote to this important aspect of career preparation for their students. Therefore, it is crucial that the planning committee be very thoughtful and deliberate in regards to the planning and coordination of the mentoring program as early in the planning process as possible.

In order to implement a high-quality mentoring program, a number of aspects should be considered. These include:

- The recruitment and training of mentors
- The mentor-mentee interface structures
- The communication structures with mentors, students, and school staff about expectations related to program participation
- The coordination of school-wide mentoring events

Because mentors typically are provided by the Employer Partner, the Industry Liaison would likely be the primary coordinator for the program. Industry Liaisons work for the employer partner and are responsible for implementing employer commitments to the school. In addition, school staff members, including the Workplace Learning Coordinator, guidance counselors, and/or Internship Coordinator, also play important roles in building and coordinating the program.

The coordinator of the mentoring program can recruit mentors from a diverse set of employees representing a range of areas within the company. It is particularly important to target recruitment efforts in the areas or departments where student interns and future graduates will eventually work. Mentors can also be drawn from a pool of recent retirees. Most likely, it will also be necessary to recruit mentors from companies other than the school's industry partner because of the volume of mentors needed for this school model. If so, mentors should be recruited from the same industry and trained alongside mentors from the Industry Partner.

Mentor training should include discussions about the goals and unique aspects of P-TECH 9-14 schools in order to ensure that consistent messages are conveyed to students about college and career preparation. Program expectations should be made very clear from the beginning so that mentors and mentees know what is expected of them in a mentor-mentee relationship.

Finally, the school's Steering Committee can support mentoring programs by helping with recruitment and suggesting structures for mentoring programs. The Steering Committee should also set the overall goals and expectations of the mentoring program with a plan for evaluation.

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2. Matching Mentors and Mentees

Matching of mentors to mentees is both ‘art and science’, like many aspects of the educational process, and so it would be wise to seek advice from teachers and guidance counselors on possible mentor-mentee matches. Mentors are typically matched to mentees of the same gender, which can be a challenge if the school is predominately one gender. Surveys can be created by the school and employer partner and administered to students and mentor candidates to assist in the matching process. In addition, online tools may be found to assist in the matching. Surveys could ask questions related to academic strengths and challenges, career aspirations, and extracurricular interests. Ideally, mentors are committing to their students throughout their educational experience in high school, but that may not be possible. It is best to be able to draw from a pool of mentor candidates when mentors are unable to continue their mentoring relationship with their mentee.

3. Security Measures

Many school districts require mentor candidates to undergo comprehensive background checks, including fingerprinting, before they can participate in a mentoring program. Security checks take time and often cost money, so it is important for the planning team to plan for this aspect of the program. Schools may require a signed parent permission form in order for their child to participate in the mentor program. Also, it is essential that any online mentoring include adequate security measures and protect individual student information.

4. Training Mentors

All participant, including program managers, teachers, mentors and students, should receive training before they participate in the program. Mentors should be trained to focus on assisting mentees develop personal and professional skills, such as decision-making, values clarification, and long-range planning.

In one-on-one mentoring programs, mentors need to be trained and guided in a number of areas, including:

- Appropriate activities and settings for mentoring
- Emergency-related protocols
- Active listening, asking questions, and providing feedback to young people
- Aspects of the community that are relevant to their mentee’s experience, especially if it is different from the mentor’s own, which can include explorations about differences in religion, race, language, culture and class
- Communication techniques with mentees’ families
- The social services available in their mentees’ communities and, in collaboration with program staff, help their mentees access these services

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5. Evaluation of Mentorship Program

The coordinator of the mentoring program may want to consider administering surveys to students and mentors, as well school staff. Focus groups can also be conducted in order to uncover information about the program. Surveys and focus groups provide a chance for mentors and mentees to give feedback on the program in structured ways. The results can help the partnerships make mid- and end-of-program changes. The data collected from these surveys and focus groups can also be used when writing grants or sharing information about the school's mentoring program to potential industry partners and future mentors.

6. Compensating Mentors

Al Generally speaking, mentors are volunteers and, therefore, are not compensated for the work they do with students. Some companies have community service and volunteering programs in which employees are recognized for completing a certain number of service hours. Because mentors commit to spending many hours of their time with their students, often outside of regular work hours, it is important that mentors are recognized for their time and effort.

Some Suggested ways to acknowledge mentors may include

- Certificates
- Periodic letters or emails from the mentor coordinator and/or school principal
- Letter from the CEO of the industry partner
- End of year activity or celebration at the school

SAMPLE MENTOR PROGRAM TIMELINE

Yearly

- July: Recruit local mentors
- August/September: Train mentors and school staff on mentoring model and online platform
- October- November: Organize mandatory, in-person, kick-off event at school
- March: Arrange mid-year mentor event at school
- May: Organize mandatory, in-person, end-of-year celebration/closing event at school
- Early June: Schedule end-of-year surveys/focus groups; Review program implementation for following school year
- Late June: Review Mentor Program with school staff and administration



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Monthly

- Schedule meetings with teachers and administration to review mentor progress and participation
- Organize optional work-based learning events at the school for mentors to attend
- Implement participation incentives for students

Weekly

- Weekly emails to mentors, students and teachers with participation reports
- Responses to mentor questions/requests
- Monitor online site for uploaded attachments, user requests and participation reports

For more information about the P-TECH 9-14 model, please visit ptech.org