

Mentoring Matters

JOURNALISM EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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JEA MENTOR PROGRAM

POWERFUL
SUPPORT

PROVEN
RESULTS

267 MENTEES
(OVER SIX YEARS)

75.3% MENTEE
RETENTION
(OVER FIVE YEARS)

NEW ADVISERS BECOME QUALITY ADVISERS, STAY IN THE PROFESSION

by Peggy Gregory, CJE

As we know, mentoring has many faces: the next-door, buddy mentor, the peer mentor or the trained, experienced professional. While the first two may have value, an experienced adviser given proven, systematic training can be the mentor who helps mold the next generation of independent, dynamic advisers.

Of course the latter is the JEA mentor.

Developed from a model based on and sanctioned by the New Teacher Center, the JEA Mentor Program has trained 44 mentors in 17 states to help new advisers with pedagogy and best journalistic standards and practices all the while using a coaching model which helps new advisers begin to problem solve for themselves so that when the mentoring cycle comes to an end in two or three years, the mentee is a more confident, self-sufficient adviser. He or she has been taught to fish!

But the use of precise mentoring tools does not negate the personal touch. "Ellen [Kersey] always comes to my class with such a positive attitude and is very direct with what is important and offers tools and ideas to deal with my yearbook class," said Rebecca Buchanan in her exit survey.

Mentee Julieanne McClain echoed the sentiment in her survey. "It has been wonderful having Wayne and Georgia [Dunn] around, and I'm pretty

sure I have well-exceeded my 'two-year mentorship' program with them! They have taught me a ton, but they have also just been an encouragement or friends to lean on when the job feels lonely, overwhelming, or unpredictable. It's also nice to know that before I got to know other journalism teachers from the state, I would see at least two friendly faces at conferences!"

Of course, the real proof of success with any mentoring program comes in the retention of new teachers. According to National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) in "High Teacher Turnover Rates are a Big Problem for America's Public Schools," March, 2011, teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past 15 years with 46 percent of all new teachers in the United States leaving the profession within five years. Yet, 75.3 percent of advisers surveyed in the first five years of the JEA Mentoring program have remained in the field in spite of many more demands and pressures than the average



Melissa Dixon, a former mentee of Marie Parsons, is now president of the Alabama Scholastic Press Association and unofficially mentors other new advisers.

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“I SEE MENTEES TAKING ON LEADERSHIP ROLES EARLIER IN THEIR CAREERS THAN THEY MIGHT HAVE WITHOUT MENTORING AND ENCOURAGEMENT.” MARY ANNE MCCLLOUD, JEA MENTOR, COMMITTEE MEMBER

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teacher faces, according to committee records.

Mentor and committee member Bill Flechtner can attest to these facts. “Most of the advisers I worked with are still advising. That has been a reversal of what has happened for years in Oregon: new advisers leaving their positions before their first year is over. That is the success that the mentor program brings to this profession.”

Flechtner’s successes include an adviser becoming actively involved in state journalism programs and successfully reviving a dying program. Another mentee restarted a dormant newspaper program while two of his adviser-mentees successfully transitioned from the commercial publications business to the classroom with no teacher training whatsoever.

Finally, one of his advisers worked with an after-school program and published issues despite his lack of training in teaching and advising, Flechtner said.

But the value of the program doesn’t stop there. JEA has found a way through the mentor program to channel the talents, wisdom and years of experience of retired advisers whose expertise might otherwise be lost.

Nick Ferentinos, a mentor committee member and former trainer for the New Teacher Center, put it this way: “Veteran advisers, especially retired ones, can be a lost resource. Mentoring is a way they can be revitalized and made to feel valued.

“Retired advisers who want to remain active in scholastic journalism education, until now, have had few ways to do that. Besides their work supporting new advisers, our mentors have played key roles in conventions since the program began in the fall of 2007,” Ferentinos said. “Convention sessions by these skilled and learned advisers wouldn’t exist without the mentor program. As a profession, we need to embrace those veterans and help them share that knowledge and experience with the many needy new advisers we have.”

Perhaps Iowa mentee Alissa Hansen sums up the value of the mentor-mentee relationship best as she reflects on the role played

LEADERSHIP: VALUE-ADDED

by Julie Dodd, MJE

Five mentees in the Mentoring Program have been named JEA Rising Stars – Jody Evans (Hillcrest High School, Tuscaloosa, Ala.), Melanie Huynh-Duc (Northwest Guilford High School, Greensboro, N.C.), Evelyn Lauer (Niles West High School, Skokie, Ill.), Erica Rickard (Newton High School, Newton, Kan.) and Jessica Young (Orange Glen High School, Escondido, Calif.). All say their JEA mentors have made a significant difference in their teaching and leadership.

Rickard now is a member of the Kansas Scholastic Press Association board, and Young is co-chair of the JEA/NSPA San Diego Convention.

Their mentors – Konnie Krislock, Mary Anne McCloud, Marie Parsons, Martha Rothwell and Randy Swikle – have stayed involved in JEA and scholastic journalism because of the JEA Mentoring Program. They along with the other mentors attend JEA/NSPA conventions – judging contests and serving as speakers.

by her mentor, Gary Lindsay.

“He has always just been there for me when I needed advice and guidance. It was so wonderful knowing that I had an advocate during this most challenging time. These first two years can be quite chaotic if you do not have support; luckily my administration is incredible, but having a mentor makes things a lot more streamline. I feel much more confident in my abilities as an adviser because of what my mentor, Gary, has given me: support and endless encouragement.”



Mentees pictured with this article have been or are now in the Mentor Program.

MENTEES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

MENTEES GRADUATE FROM THE PROGRAM AFTER TWO YEARS



JEA MENTORS OFFER SUPPORT THROUGH LONG DISTANCE MENTORING

SOMETIMES THE PHONE CALLS ARE JUST DEVOTED TO BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP BY LISTENING AND SHOWING THAT WE UNDERSTAND. THAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE MENTORING PROCESS.

JANICE HATFIELD, PENNSYLVANIA MENTOR



by Linda Barrington, MJE

Distance isn't the most important factor in mentoring.

JEA mentors know that their skills, knowledge, attitudes, experiences and contacts are what make mentoring work. In fact, they use a variety of methods and intentional mentoring skills for effective communication and support, wherever their mentees are located.

Both mentor and mentee face more challenges when the distance is greater. Oregon mentor Bill Flechtner works with Tricia Constantino in Nevada.

"The biggest challenge of long-distance mentoring has been that Bill cannot actually be in my classroom to see each step of the publishing process," Constantino said. "If Bill were able to observe my class, he could possibly give me specific feedback about weaknesses/holes in my teaching that I am not aware of." Flechtner agrees about the difficulties of being so far away.

"Lacking face-to-face meetings means longer getting to know each other. I cannot see the classroom or meet the students and see how the classroom runs. Tricia has said that I can't experience the dynamics of her classroom," Flechtner said.

Communication can be challenging even when the distance isn't as great as that between Flechtner and Constantino.

"I have had mentees who are only about 60 miles away -- not prohibitive in terms of miles, time and expense," Alabama mentor Marie Parsons said. "Some of them prefer not to have visits beyond once a semester or even once a year. I stay in touch with them via email and mail them material or a written note occasionally." Her mentee, Tyrone Jones, is pleased with this non-intrusive mentoring style. "I know my mentor is available when I have questions," he said.

COMMUNICATION

While email is a favored method of communication between many mentors and mentees, special challenges are inherent. A person's tone is difficult to read in an email. Feelings can be hurt and misunderstandings can occur without careful attention to the wording and timeliness of messages. Even during phone calls, they are unable to see the other person, making nonverbal cues difficult to pick up on. With conscious effort, mentors and mentees can learn to read one another's attitudes and emotions better.

"Communication depends so much on the mentee continuing to write messages and discuss how things are going," Flechtner said. "If there has been some time between messages, then I send an inquiry message about how things are going and encourage communication. It really depends on the mentee keeping the communication



Kansas mentor Mary Anne McCloud heads out to meet with one of her mentees. "My long-distance mentees and I use email, chatting and phone calls to keep in touch and to answer timely questions," McCloud said.

Photo by Susan Young

going." He suggests communicating at least every other week. That time frame works for him and Constantino because it gives her time to implement new ideas or strategies.

Oregon mentor Ellen Kersey encourages her mentees to email her whenever they have a question or a problem. "In some cases, the brand new teachers are so overwhelmed that

they can't figure out how to take the time to ask for help," Kersey said.

Arizona mentor Carmen Wendt said she emails a tip or some type of useful information to all of her mentees regularly which helps with communication. But she said she found long-distance mentoring frustrating and doesn't think it worked well for her.

"We did meet at state conventions and workshops," Wendt said, "and when my mentee had a concern she would call or email me. So, I feel that was helpful."

Constantino said one advantage of "long-distance mentoring is that I put all of Bill's emails in a folder on my computer. This way, I can reference Bill's words of wisdom multiple times. Bill's emails are a HUGE resource."

Skype and Google+ Hangouts both provide opportunities for mentoring partners to see and talk with one another. Ohio mentors Georgia and Wayne Dunn have used both methods to "meet" with their mentees in the far reaches of the state. Flechter and Constantino used Skype so he could meet with her staff to do an issue critique and answer their questions. She said this was great "because he was also able to offer suggestions for class organization, such as submitting story ideas."

Iowa mentor Gary Lindsay has mentees two and three hours away. "I have made sure to visit on-site at least twice, to meet the principal, and to get an understanding of the facilities and school community," Lindsay said.

GROUP MEETINGS

The Dunns have promoted group meetings for their mentees in Ohio, and Kansas mentor Mary Anne McCloud has modified that idea with a field trip for distant mentees. Two of them traveled to Newton, Kan., to observe former mentee Erica Rickard in her classroom.

"They could see how her room was set up, and they used their phones to take pictures of things they liked," McCloud said. "They observed her teach a lesson and saw how she uses technology in her program. We could discuss together what they were seeing, and Erica was able to answer questions. I brought in lunch



Nevada adviser Tricia Constantino works with Bill Flechtner, an Oregon mentor, because her state doesn't have any JEA mentors. "Bill's suggestions have resonated with my teaching," she said, "and while I am still working on implementing many of his ideas, my journalism program is much-improved due to Bill's guidance."

Photo by Kate Taormina

for all of them, and we continued our conversations. I think they found the day productive, and they told me that they enjoyed riding down together and visiting. They also enjoyed a break from their school routine."

In Pennsylvania, mentor Janice Hatfield worked with two mentees who were four and a half hours away from her but only one and a half hour away from each other. She spent two days and stayed at a motel between the two schools.

"If I am going to spend the time and money, I want the experience to be really useful," Hatfield said, "so I carried a variety of materials so that we could address whatever came up. However, we also developed a number of issues we wanted to deal with. The face-to-face is REALLY important, even if it is only once or twice a year.

With long-distance mentoring in place, new journalism teachers in states without JEA mentors and advisers who

live far from a mentor in their own state can still have a JEA mentor. Distance mentoring broadens the range of support.

"Signing up for the mentoring program is a wonderful opportunity for personal growth and for the growth of any journalism program," Constantino said. "I've been challenged to not only be truthful about my journalism class and its successes and challenges, but to put into practice Bill's suggestions.

"Bill has taught me about basic routines in journalism, and he has also encouraged both me and my students to continue to improve our paper."

Regardless of distance, mentors are not just buddies or guides along the side. They are sometimes teachers, sometimes problem-solvers, sometimes co-constructors of knowledge and ALWAYS good listeners.



Mentees' comments: THIS IS WHAT HAVING A JEA MENTOR MEANS TO US



Heather Jancoski
Desert Sands Middle School
Phoenix, Arizona

“Joe Pfeiff and I meet monthly in person to discuss issues and

concerns I am having as well as to celebrate what is working well. He has been a wealth of information for me which is huge since I have no journalism background, just technology. He was able to walk me through how to handle my first prior review issue with our newspaper on a hot topic, too; without his help I know that issue would have faltered our newspaper. I am very appreciative to Joe and everything he has done with me thus far. I look forward to continue to work with him, and he has even encouraged me to dive deeper into journalism for myself.”



Bridget Freiler
Pottsville Area High School
Pottsville, Pennsylvania

“When I became the publications adviser at my high school, I

thought I had things pretty well figured out. It turns out I didn't. If it weren't for my mentor, Mrs. Kathy Zwiebel, I'm all but certain the stress and frustration of the job would have driven me away after my first year. Instead, I've come to find that I love my job thanks to Kathy's guidance and unwavering support. She draws from her 30-plus years of experience to answer every single question I have, and she reassures me that I'm not the first person to go through anything! Kathy is a mentor and a dear friend, and I simply could not do this job without her.”



“ The JEA Mentor Program puts an expert at my disposal. My mentor [Linda Barrington] offers me advice, shares resources and connects me to a broader journalism community. She does even more for my crew. During one visit, she taught an editor how to use Adobe InDesign more efficiently, coached another how to improve her page design and shared with the entire staff her experiences with challenges they face. Her support continues even when she isn't on site, such as offering feedback and critiques and coaching us to become better journalists. Without a doubt, joining the JEA Mentor Program is one of the best decisions I have made as a newspaper adviser. ”

Aaron Ramponi, Appleton North High School, Appleton, Wisconsin



Justin Sharp
Chariton High School
Chariton, Iowa

“Working with Gary [Lindsay] has been a big benefit to our program and to me profession-

ally. Starting a school newspaper, there have been a number of issues (great and small) that have popped up – things I wouldn't have thought of before taking this on. Gary has been supportive and helpful every step of the way. We've also been able to try new things and take on more serious issues in our newspaper, knowing that Gary has our back.”



Brianna Rapp
Woodbridge High School
Irvine, California

“I have found the JEA Mentor Program to be invaluable. Being a journalism adviser is

stimulating and rewarding, but it can also be incredibly overwhelming, especially when you're starting out. My mentor,

Carol Strauss, has provided immeasurable support, answering all of my questions and just helping to keep my spirits up when I've felt stressed. The JEA mentor program has helped me survive my first year (of hopefully many to come) as a journalism adviser.”



Natalie Niemeyer
Des Moines East High School
Des Moines, Iowa

“I have known my mentor, Gary Lindsay,

since I student taught in his classroom back in 2011. Our mentorship has turned into a friendship. I have constant support and advice from him, whenever I need it. Being a journalism adviser is tough. No one else in our buildings really understands the challenges we sometimes face or even what we do each day. It's important to have someone to go to when you need to talk or have an issue. Gary is that person for me. He has made himself a welcome and frequent visitor in my classroom, and my kids look forward to seeing him!”

GETTING TOGETHER: MENTEES BENEFIT FROM SUPPORT

by Linda Barrington, MJE

The conversation moved from subject to subject over dinner, as the mentees attending the Kettle Moraine Press Association's Winter Advisers' Seminar kept asking more questions. And the veteran advisers at their tables were generous with their responses.

It is important for mentees to belong to the professional community of journalism teachers in their state or region. Starting out as a publication teacher/adviser can be a challenging experience, professionally, emotionally and financially.

While some mentors host lunch or dinner meetings for a group of mentees in a geographic area, it is also enriching for mentees to have an opportunity to spend time with many veteran advisers, especially in a setting without students.

KEMPA board members understand how important this is, and they also remember how difficult it is for a new



Mentees (both new and graduated) and mentors from Illinois and Wisconsin gather in March at the Winter Advisers' Seminar of the Kettle Moraine Press Association. One of the ways KEMPA supports its mentees is by waiving fees for this annual event. Front row: Sandy Jacoby, mentor; Kelly Engler, Harlem High School (Babs Erickson, mentor); Linda Barrington, MJE, mentor; Mary Anne Pysson, Alcott College Prep West Campus (Randy Swikle, mentor); Nicole Hoffmann, St. Francis High School (Sandy Jacoby, mentor). Back row: Rachel Rice, Rockford Lutheran High School (Babs Erickson, mentor); Angela Rackowski, St. Francis High School (Sandy Jacoby, mentor); Aaron Ramponi, Appleton North High School (Linda Barrington, mentor); Evelyn Lauer, CJE, Niles West High School (Randy Swikle, mentor); Ben Tripp, Stoughton High School (Dave Wallner, mentor); Abby Riese, Oregon High School (Dave Wallner, mentor). *Photo by Kurt Hornby*

adviser to get permission and funding to attend such events. That's why KEMPA waives fees for mentees to attend its Winter Advisers' Seminar.

"That translates not only into successful new advisers but also future members for both KEMPA and JEA as young advisers learn how valuable both are," KEMPA President Sandy Jacoby said.

The Mentor Program encourages state scholastic press associations to

provide incentives for new teachers to become active in their organization by providing any or all of the following for the JEA mentees for their first two years: waiver of membership fees; waiver or reduction of fees for workshops, conferences and other events; welcome and recognition at their events; and waiver or reduction of fees for publication critiques or competitions.



“ FOR MANY TEACHERS WHO ARE NEW TO ADVISING, MENTORING HAS BEEN A LIFELINE AND SYMBOL OF HOPE WHEN THE OVERWHELMING NATURE OF MEDIA ADVISING RESTS HEAVY ON A TEACHER'S DAY. IN ALABAMA OUR MENTORS HAVE ACHIEVED THE GOAL OF NOT ONLY KEEPING NEW ADVISERS AFLOAT BUT HAVE TRANSFORMED THEIR MEDIA SKILLS TO A LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM MANY NEW TEACHERS WOULD NOT HAVE DREAMT POSSIBLE! ”



~ MEREDITH CUMMINGS, ALABAMA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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