



Designing High-Quality Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs (R-TAPs): Mentoring

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Educators are critical in student success. However, since 2020, educators in the United States have left or intend to leave their positions at higher rates.^{1,2} The result, when paired with a dwindling recruitment pipeline,³ is a significant shortage of highly qualified educators across the country.

The Center on Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce (SSEW) addresses this shortage by increasing the replication and scaling of evidence-based practices. This series of briefs explores high-leverage solutions to improve the recruitment, preparation, and retention of educators.

The Need for Mentors

Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs (R-TAPs) are well aligned with strategic staffing models that have team leaders or lead teachers who can also serve as mentors to apprentice teachers.^{4,5} Mentorship also positively impacts student achievement. Compared with teacher candidates in traditional preservice teacher education programs, apprentices in R-TAPs have comprehensive, long-term experiences in real-world settings. Therefore, the preservice cooperating teacher mentor model requires rethinking for use in an R-TAP, given the R-TAP's longer duration and specific requirements. Employed by the district, R-TAP mentor teachers supervise, advise, and evaluate apprentice teachers over the course of an apprenticeship, which may last multiple years, in an on-the-job learning environment. As R-TAPs rapidly expand across the country, developing high-quality mentorship models will be key to their success.

Design Considerations

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) defines a mentor* as “an experienced worker who has attained a mastery level of skill, abilities, and competencies required for the occupation.”⁵ R-TAPs need to find teachers with this mastery, train and compensate them as mentors, and support them as they take on this new role. R-TAP mentor design, therefore, should consider five components: mentor selection, training, roles and models, compensation, and satisfaction and support.⁶

* A mentor may also sometimes be referred to as a “journeyworker,” which is defined by the DOL as “a worker who has attained a level of skill, abilities and competencies recognized within an industry as having mastered the skills and competencies required for the occupation.”

Selection

The federal guidelines for R-TAPs do not specify selection criteria for mentor teachers. However, many R-TAP sponsors and employers have defined requirements for mentors, including minimum number of years teaching, effectiveness ratings, and working in the same licensure/endorsement area or grade level as the apprentice they mentor. For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (PDLI) published selection criteria for R-TAP mentors that describe the mentor teacher’s evaluation status, experience and skills with mentorship, mentor training, and assessment of dispositions (**Exhibit 1**).⁷ The PDLI Handbook also provides a rubric that R-TAPs can use to score and select prospective mentors against the selection criteria.

Exhibit 1. Sample selection criteria for mentors, developed by PDLI

CRITERIA	CONSIDERATION
Teaching Certification/Licensure	Mentor Teacher holds a standard teaching certification or licensure in the relevant subject area or grade level.
Degree Attainment	Mentor Teacher has a minimum of a bachelor's degree (master's degree preferred).
Years of Service	Mentor Teacher has a minimum of three (3) years of classroom teaching experience in the relevant subject area or grade level; Mentor Teacher has a minimum of one (1) year of experience in the LEA
Status of Evaluation	Mentor Teacher has received satisfactory teacher evaluations in the prior three (3) years.
Mentor Experience & Skills	Mentor Teacher has completed the required mentorship training prior to actively mentoring an apprentice. Mentor Teacher has experience and skills in mentoring, coaching, or leading teachers or students in educational settings.
Mentorship Training	Mentor Teacher has completed the required mentorship training prior to actively mentoring an apprentice.
Dispositions	Knowledge, application, and evaluation of competencies associated with the Work Process Schedule; demonstrates positive attitude toward the profession and engagement with students, colleagues, and community.

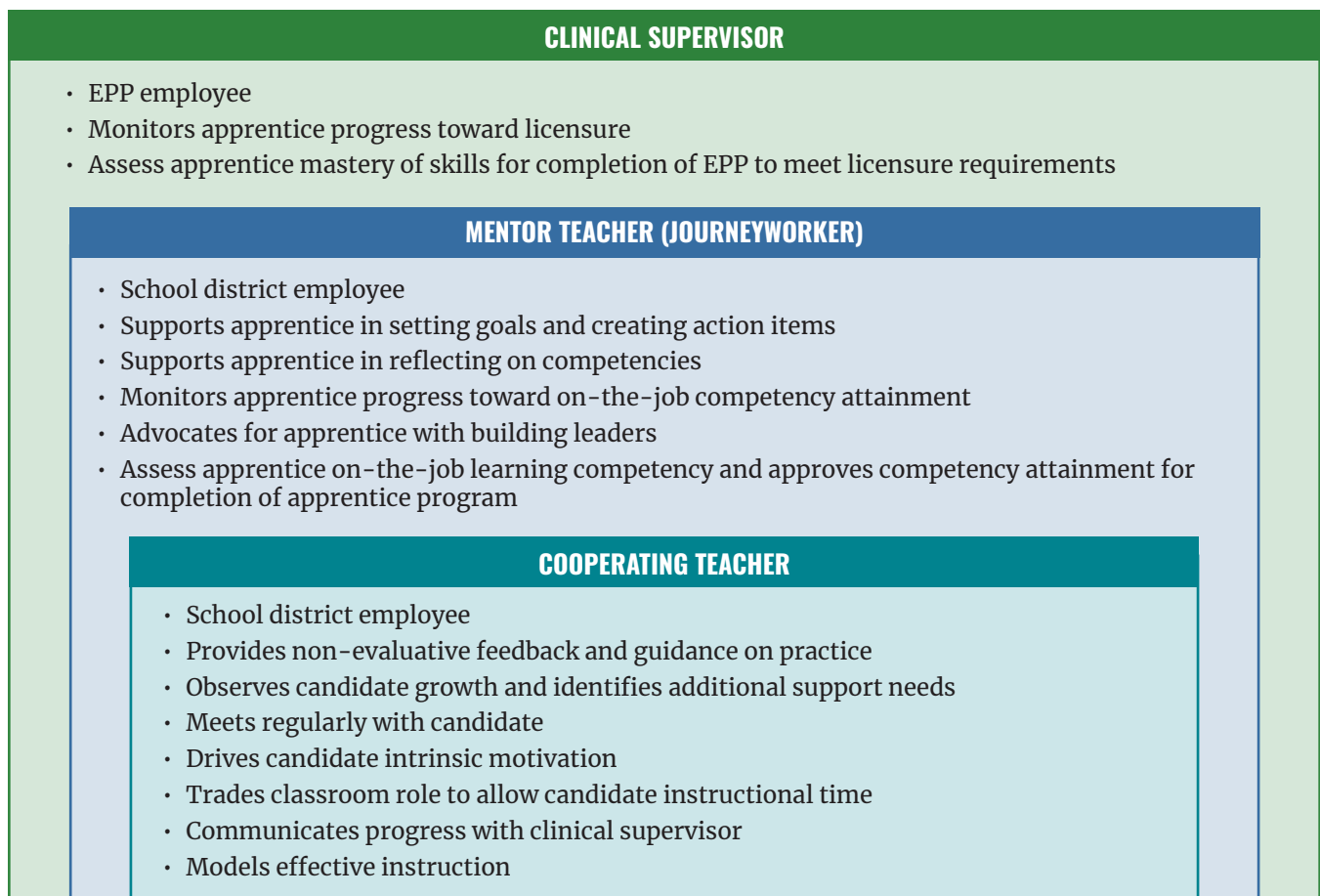
Source: PDLI’s Mentor Teacher Handbook (2025)⁸

Roles and Responsibilities

Mentors help apprentices set goals, track progress toward demonstrating competencies, and assess demonstration of on-the-job learning and competency attainment. Mentors help apprentices understand their roles and career path and provide support if apprentices face any challenges. Strong mentors help apprentices reflect on their own practice, being willing to share advice from their own experience, and being empathetic while remaining objective and organized.⁹

The role of the mentor complements the roles of the cooperating teacher and clinical supervisor present in traditional Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). Typically, in an EPP, the EPP employs a clinical supervisor who monitors and evaluates the mentee. The district-employed cooperating teacher provides feedback on teaching practice to the mentee and the clinical supervisor. **Exhibit 2** outlines these roles along with the R-TAP mentor role, listing their employer and responsibilities. R-TAP programs may incorporate structures from traditional programs, although the responsibilities by role may differ. For example, a mentor teacher will likely observe apprentices' skills growth and provide non-evaluative feedback, roles traditionally assigned to the cooperating teacher. R-TAP designers may work with partners to shift support among the roles to best support the apprentices in the programs.

Exhibit 2. Teacher apprentice supports by role



Source: Design Considerations: Mentoring in K-12 Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Programs (2025)⁶

Training

Mentor teachers benefit from ongoing training and support to help them be effective in their roles and to become familiar with the structure and expectations of an R-TAP. Mentor training can vary from formal training to postsecondary coursework as well as ongoing supports like weekly meetings or communities of practice. Topics covered in mentor training often include items such as philosophy of coaching, coaching practices, and how to give effective feedback. Mentor training outcomes should measure mentor understanding of the apprentice competencies practices of assessment to document apprentices' demonstration of those competencies. In some states like Colorado and Nevada, mentors earn a certificate or endorsement upon successful completion of a training program.

Compensation

DOL does not require mentors to be compensated, but many R-TAPs provide mentors with stipends, pay increases, and other forms of incentives (e.g., paid training, tuition scholarships, loan forgiveness, or acknowledged leadership roles and credentials) for their time and expertise. Stipends for mentor teachers vary across the country, with some programs offering stipends as high as \$10,000 per year. Some programs also have tiered approaches, such as in the Clarksville–Montgomery County School System in Tennessee, where the primary mentor receives \$3,000 and secondary mentors receive \$1,000.¹⁰ Stipends are often funded through a combination of braided funds, including funds from employing school districts, institutes of higher education, and dedicated state funding budgets. Some states have created legislation requiring mentor compensation, such as Florida.¹¹ In Florida, mentors receive \$2,000 after year one of mentoring, and another \$2,000 upon the apprentice's completion of the program and hiring by the district.¹²

Mentor Satisfaction & Support

In addition to being a recruitment and preparation strategy for new teachers, R-TAPs also act as a retention strategy by helping current teachers take on new challenges and grow in their careers. Through the mentorship experience, mentors learn transformational leadership skills, experience increased intrinsic motivation in the workplace, feel more fulfilled in their profession, and are generally more satisfied and committed in their careers compared with those who have never mentored.^{13,14}

Providing teachers with leadership opportunities that allow them to stay in the classroom also strengthens their teaching practices and enhances their understanding of content and pedagogy.¹⁵ Mentors gain new ideas and strategies, enhancing their teaching practices by exchanging information with mentees from different backgrounds and generations.¹⁶ The relationship between mentor and apprentice can serve as reverse mentorship, fostering cooperation and collaborative learning when complementary skills are matched.¹⁷ As such, some R-TAPs have developed mentor teacher cohorts and Communities of Practice that provide opportunities for collaboration and reflection.










Recommendations

R-TAP sponsors and partners can take the following actions to implement high-quality mentoring within their programs.


















- » **Define mentor selection criteria** that align with state/sponsor requirements and/or requirements of the strategic staffing approach. Consider including criteria such as a minimum number of years of experience, experience in the same licensure areas or grade level as the apprentice they mentor, effectiveness ratings, demonstrated leadership, and assessment of dispositions. Consider asking for peer and school leader recommendations for prospective mentors.
- » **Design differentiated professional development opportunities** that are based on experience levels that mentors may have. **Identify key skills and knowledge** to measure ideal practice and the development of practice to be used in the professional development activities that lead to a mentor credential.
- » **Clearly delineate mentor roles and responsibilities** and other related roles like a clinical supervisor or administrator. Work with R-TAP partners to consider traditional EPPs alongside the needs of mentorships in R-TAPs (e.g., see **Exhibit 2**) to identify appropriate roles and responsibilities.
- » **Select or adapt successful mentoring models**, such as gradual release, co-teaching with co-planning, team mentoring, and strategic staffing. Consider the school organization, number of apprentices in a school, mentors available, mentor training and support, to select or adapt a model that fits the R-TAP's needs.
- » **Compensate mentors for their time and expertise** through stipends, pay increases, and other forms of incentives. Consider successful incentives such as paid training, tuition scholarships, loan forgiveness, mentor leadership positions, and earned credentials.
- » **Create tools (e.g., apprentice evaluation tools and data management systems) to document and track apprentice progress** towards demonstration of compensations and train mentors on how to use them. Train mentors on providing feedback and advice on areas of strength and growth.
- » **Provide mentors with career opportunities.** Consider ways that experienced teachers can leverage the mentor role to advance in their own careers without having to leave the classroom. This may include release time, teacher leadership acknowledgment, or support with co-teaching with the apprentice so the mentor can implement or document advanced classroom teaching practices.

Resources

The resources below provide additional information on mentoring in R-TAPs.

<p>REPORT </p> <p><u><i>Design Considerations: Mentoring in K-12 Teacher RA Programs</i></u> </p> <p>This report outlines design considerations for mentoring in R-TAPs and includes examples of what some programs are currently doing.</p>	<p>HANDBOOK </p> <p><u><i>Teacher Register Apprenticeship in Pennsylvania, Mentor Teacher Handbook</i></u></p> <p>This handbook from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry provides an overview of mentoring requirements for R-TAPs in Pennsylvania, including selection criteria, training, and frequently asked questions.</p>
<p>GUIDE </p> <p><u><i>Mentor Resource Guide for Work-Based Learning and On-the-Job Training</i></u></p> <p>This guide from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development provides strategies, best practices, and tools to help mentors in their role.</p>	<p>GUIDE </p> <p><u><i>Kansas Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Sequence and Duration Guide</i></u></p> <p>This guide from the Kansas State Department of Education provides a sample apprenticeship plan for an R-TAP.</p>
<p>WEBPAGE </p> <p><u><i>ApprenticeshipUSA's Education page</i></u></p> <p>This page features information and resources from the U.S. Department of Labor about R-TAPs.</p>	<p>WEBSITE </p> <p><u><i>Pathways Alliance</i></u> </p> <p>This coalition of leading education organizations hosts many resources relevant to R-TAPs.</p>
<p>GUIDANCE </p> <p><u><i>Dear Colleague Letter</i></u></p> <p>This Dear Colleague letter from February 9, 2026, outlines existing areas of flexibility for States and districts to use funds under Title II, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to implement innovative teacher workforce strategies, such as strategic staffing.</p>	

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