

LEADERS MENTORING LEADERS **Mentoring New Administrators in Virginia Beach City Public Schools**

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ABSTRACT

The Leaders Mentoring Leaders program, implemented and delivered by the Office of Organizational Development, was designed to provide new administrators with mentoring opportunities designed to complement their development as school leaders. During the 2008-09 school year, 8 new principals and 16 new assistant principals participated in the mentoring program. *Overall, the new administrators (protégés) and their mentors expressed high levels of satisfaction with various components of the program. Protégés, mentors, and third-party evaluators reported improvements on the part of the new administrators in key leadership proficiencies following the mentoring program.*

BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2004-05, the Office of Organizational Development (OD) in Virginia Beach City Public Schools implemented and delivered mentoring programs for new and aspiring administrators. During the 2007-08 school year, the program was expanded to include new assistant principals. The mentoring initiatives collectively referred to as the Leaders Mentoring Leaders program was designed to provide participants with a structured approach for setting goals and facilitating mentoring relationships between new/aspiring administrators and experienced administrators. This evaluation brief summarizes participants' perceptions of the mentoring experience and changes in key perceived leadership proficiency as a result of the new principal and new assistant principal mentoring programs offered during the 2008-09 school year.

The Leaders Mentoring Leaders program activities were funded through a grant from the Virginia Department of Education and involved the pairing of aspiring or new administrators with experienced administrators within the school division. Protégés in the New Principal and New Assistant Principal Mentoring program completed a form identifying leadership characteristics and provided three potential preferred mentors. Final mentor assignments were determined by assistant superintendents in the Department of School Administration.

The participants in both of the mentoring programs received a 90-minute introduction to the importance of mentoring and a structured approach for setting goals and strategies for making the mentoring relationship successful. They also received a custom-designed discussion guide containing suggested topics and questions for discussion during the mentoring period. In

addition, protégés and mentors were given time during the session to plan and discuss desired outcomes from their mentoring experience.

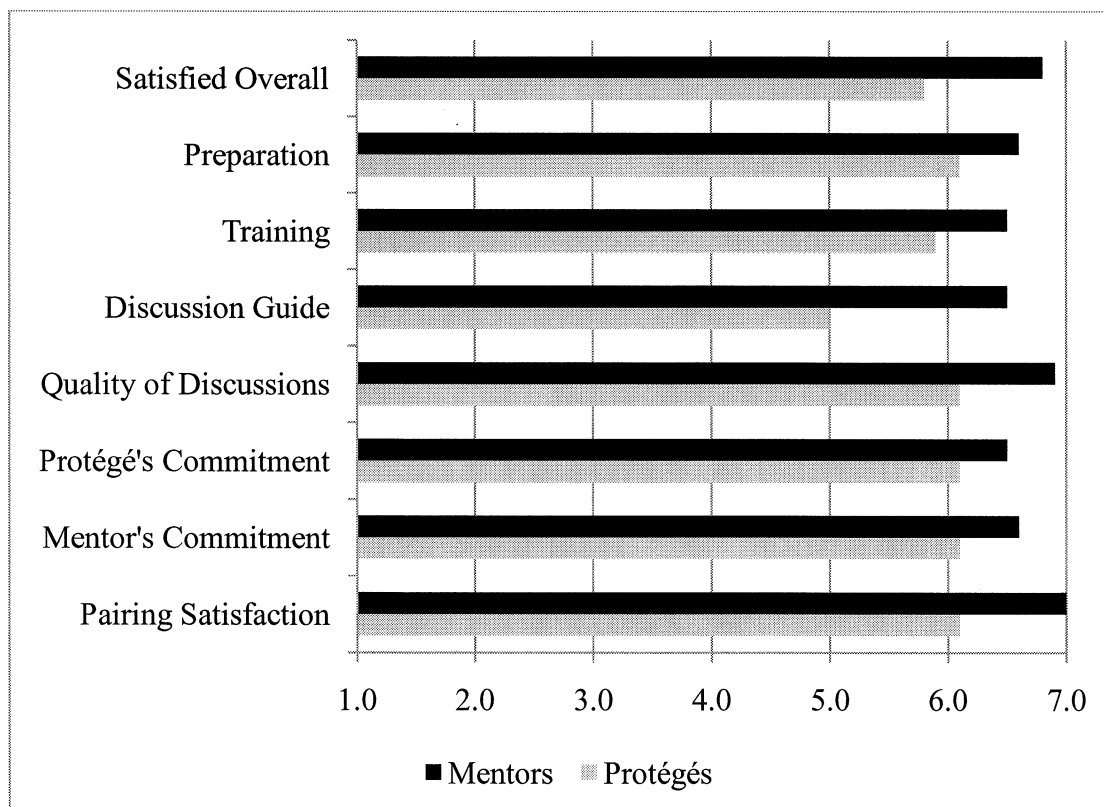
How frequently the mentoring pairs had contact and the method of contact was determined by each pair. Participants were encouraged to use the methods that worked best for the pair and to base the frequency of contact on the needs and goals of the pairings. In addition, protégés and mentors in both programs met for four mandatory luncheons throughout the school year for “Focused Conversation” on relevant topics, and the protégés completed 16 hours of VitalSmarts™ Crucial Conversations© training.

New Principal Mentoring Program

Program and Pairing Satisfaction

Figure 1 displays the average ratings of new principals (protégés) and mentors for the items addressing program and pairing satisfaction. Among mentors, the average ratings for each of the items were 6.5 or higher on a 7-point scale. The average ratings observed among the protégés were lower than the ratings among the mentors. Among protégés, the average ratings for the items addressing preparation for mentoring, the quality of the discussion between the pairs, commitment to the mentoring process, and pairing satisfaction were approximately 6.0 on the 7-point scale. The remaining items addressing overall satisfaction, the usefulness of the training received, and the usefulness of the discussion guide received average ratings that were below 6.0. The item with the lowest average rating among the new principals was the item addressing the usefulness of the discussion guide.

Figure 1
Average Ratings of Program and Pairing Satisfaction Items – New Principal Program

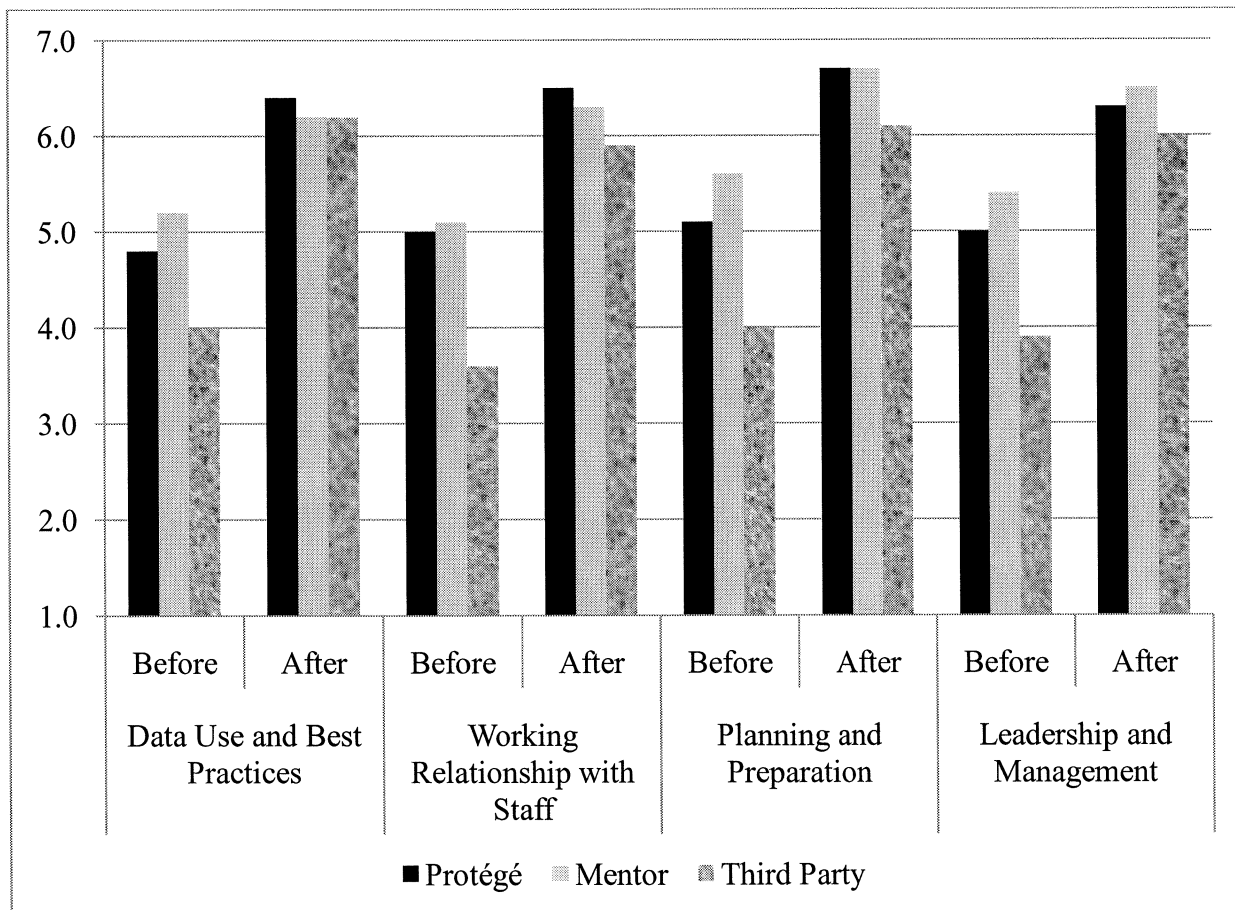


Principal Leadership Proficiencies

As part of the New Principal Mentoring program, a retrospective only pre/postassessment of leadership proficiencies based on standards defined by the Board of Education was completed by protégés, mentors, and the appropriate assistant superintendent in the Department of School Administration (third-party evaluator). The leadership proficiencies covered areas such as data use and best practices, working relationship with staff, planning and preparation, and leadership and management. Protégés, mentors, and third-party evaluators were asked to provide before and after ratings (i.e., postratings) for each of the leadership proficiency items in these categories. All items were rated on a 7-point scale with 1 representing the lowest rating and 7 representing the highest rating.

Figure 2 displays the average ratings provided by each participant group for the four leadership proficiency areas overall. All three participant groups reported higher ratings in each proficiency area following the mentoring program. Each of the average postratings provided by protégés and mentors was 6.0 or higher on the 7-point scale. All but one of the average postratings provided by the third-party evaluators were 6.0 or higher. The one exception was the average postrating provided in the area of working relationship with staff (5.9). However, the average change observed between the pre/postratings was highest among the third-party evaluators. Among third-party evaluators, the average preratings increased by approximately 2 points. Among the new principals, the average preratings increased by approximately 1.5 points while the average preratings provided by mentors increased by approximately 1 point.

Figure 2
Average Principal Leadership Proficiency Ratings by Participant Group



The individual proficiency items and the average ratings provided by each participant group appear in Appendix A. With very few exceptions, the average postratings provided by the three participant groups were all above 6.0 on a 7-point scale for each of the individual items on the survey.

General Comments About the Program

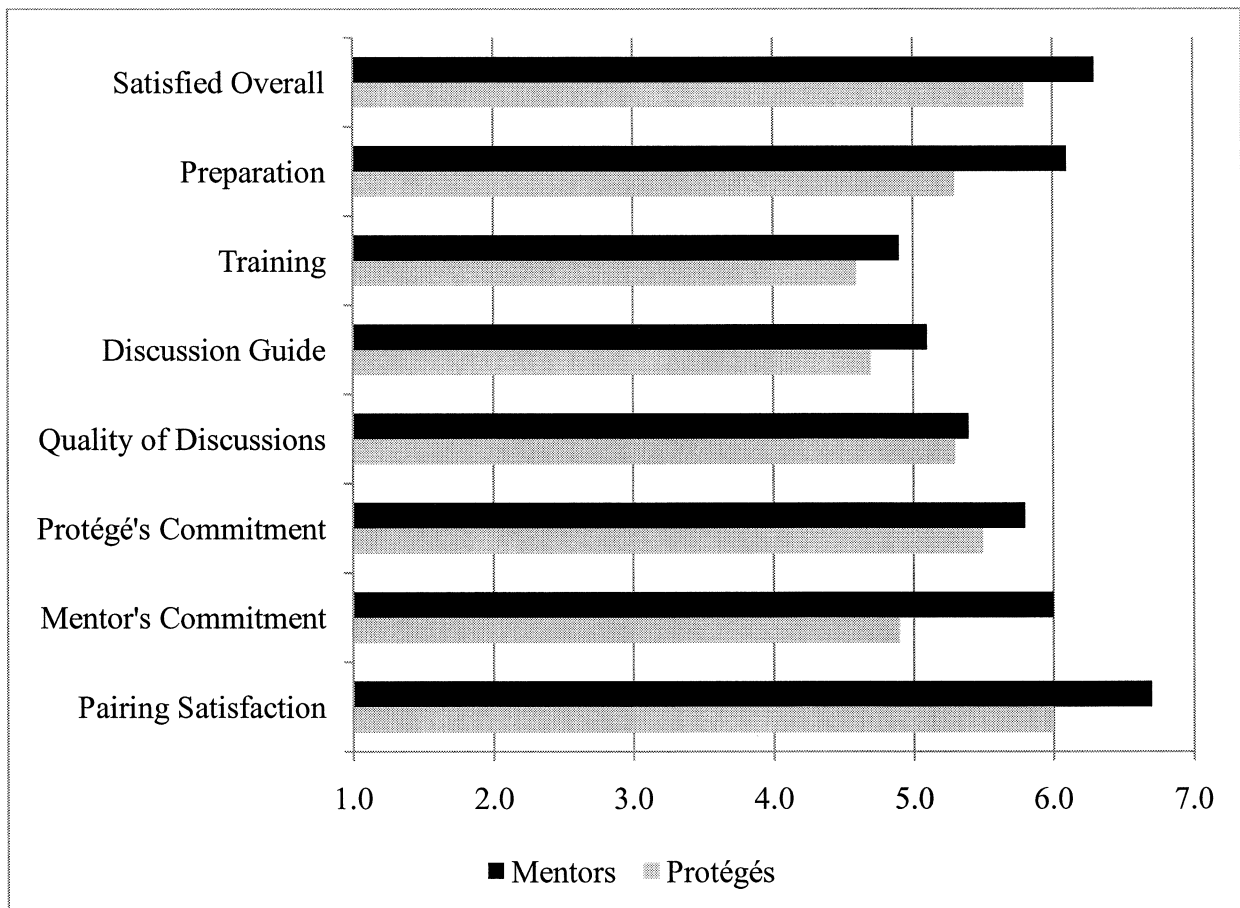
When asked to indicate what worked well in the mentoring relationship, protégés mentioned the accessibility of their mentors as well as the support and advice the mentors provided as issues arose throughout the school year. Mentors mentioned discussion, sharing, and listening as instrumental in the success of the program. Very few of the new principals made suggestions for improving the program, and those that did mentioned providing more time to meet. Several mentors also mentioned increased time to meet and “checking in” more frequently as suggested improvements to the program.

New Assistant Principal Mentoring Program

Program and Pairing Satisfaction

Figure 3 displays the average ratings of new assistant principals (protégés) and mentors for the items addressing program and pairing satisfaction. For protégés and mentors, the average ratings for the items addressing satisfaction with progress made during the program, preparation for mentoring, the quality of the discussion between the pairs, the protégé’s commitment to the mentoring process, and pairing satisfaction were 5.3 or higher on a 7-point scale. Both groups of respondents provided the lowest ratings to the item addressing the usefulness of the training and the discussion guide. In addition, protégés provided lower ratings to the item addressing their mentor’s level of commitment when compared to the mentors’ ratings of the same item.

Figure 3
Average Ratings of Program and Pairing Satisfaction Items – New Assistant Principal Program



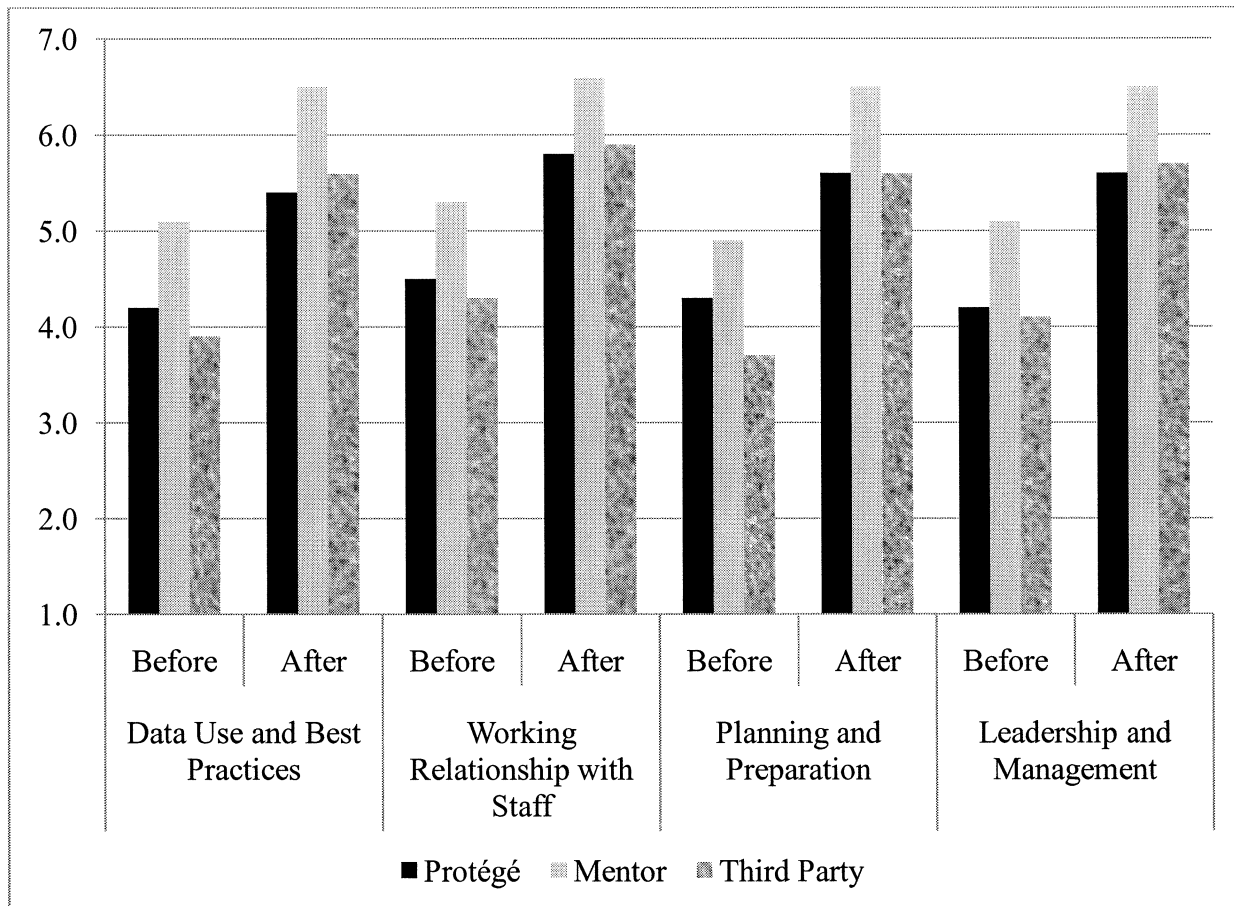
Assistant Principal Leadership Proficiencies

Leadership proficiencies for new assistant principals were also developed by staff in the Office of Organizational Development with assistance from the Adele Lynn Leadership Group. The new assistant principal proficiencies covered areas such as data use and best practices, working relationship with staff, planning and preparation, and leadership and management. Although the general categories of leadership proficiency items were the same for new principals and assistant principals, the individual items comprising the categories were specific to the role of assistant principals. New assistant principals (protégés), participating mentors, and the principals responsible for evaluating the new assistant principals (third-party evaluators) completed the retrospective only pre/postassessment of leadership proficiencies.

By the time of the survey administration, one of the new assistant principals had transferred to a position in another state. Of the remaining 15 protégés, 1 participant did not provide ratings for the leadership proficiencies and instead indicated that all of the items were not applicable. Of the 16 mentors participating in the program, 4 either provided no responses to the leadership proficiency items or selected not applicable for a majority of their responses. One of the 16 third-party evaluators also provided not applicable ratings to the leadership proficiency items. Based on the comments made in response to open-ended questions, it appeared as though the nonresponse and not applicable ratings were provided because of a lack of contact between the mentors and protégés. When asked how often the mentor met with the protégé, one mentor indicated never, one mentor indicated once, one mentor indicated once or twice, and one mentor indicated that meetings happened in passing. The protégé who did not respond to the proficiency items indicated that he/she met with a mentor once and that the program was not needed. The third-party evaluator who did not provide ratings indicated that the program was not delivered as expected.

With the caveat that a number of participants did not respond to the leadership proficiency items, Figure 4 displays the average ratings that were provided by each participant group for the four leadership proficiency areas overall. All three participant groups reported higher ratings in each proficiency area following the mentoring program. For each of the categories reported in Figure 4, the average rating provided by the mentor following the program was higher than the average rating provided by the protégés and third-party evaluators. For all three participant groups, the average postrating in each of the four leadership proficiency areas reported in Figure 4 exceeded 5.3 on a 7-point scale.

Figure 4
Average Assistant Principal Leadership Proficiency Ratings by Participant Group



The individual proficiency items and the average ratings provided by each participant group appear in Appendix B. In addition, an examination of the postratings provided to individual proficiency items revealed that all of the postratings provided by the three participant groups were 5.1 or higher.

General Comments About the Program

Protégés and mentors in the New Assistant Principals Mentoring program were asked to indicate what worked well in the mentoring relationship, and both groups mentioned open communication and availability via telephone and email. When asked what could be improved, both groups of respondents indicated more scheduled meetings, and some mentioned more formal training concerning the mentoring process. Several of the third-party evaluators expressed the opinion that the mentoring program was not the reason for the new assistant principals’ growth and, instead, indicated that growth had occurred throughout the school year because of the assistance provided from the new assistant principals’ colleagues at their school.

Summary

The results of the evaluation revealed that overall, participants and mentors in both of the Leaders Mentoring Leaders programs were satisfied with most of the program elements and their pairings. Ratings of the usefulness of the discussion guide continued to be among the lowest, particularly for participants in the New Assistant Principals program. Protégés, mentors, and third-party evaluators in both programs reported increases in the new administrators' leadership proficiencies as measured by the pre/postassessment. However, several of the participants in the New Assistant Principals program did not provide ratings and cited lack of contact as a reason. In addition, the satisfaction and proficiency ratings provided by participants in the New Assistant Principals program were lower than those provided by participants in the New Principals program. Comments made in response to open-ended survey items suggested that participants in the New Assistant Principals program perceived that they benefited from the program, but that more formal mentoring training and scheduled meeting times would improve the program. A few of the new assistant principals also suggested being paired with another assistant principal in the same building or choosing their own mentors could have made the experience even more beneficial.

Appendix A
New Principal Proficiencies 2008-09

New Principal Proficiencies		Group	Before Mentoring	After Mentoring
Data Use and Best Practices	How to review and discuss data to prepare strategies with faculty and staff members for the next school year.	Protégé	5.0	6.6
		Mentor	5.3	6.3
		Third Party	4.1	6.1
	How to analyze and discuss data and plans for instructional planning in a constructive manner.	Protégé	5.1	6.6
		Mentor	5.6	6.4
		Third Party	4.0	6.1
	How to learn from the best practices used by other schools in order to gain insights from their successes.	Protégé	4.3	6.0
		Mentor	4.8	5.9
		Third Party	4.0	6.4
Working Relationship with Staff	How to establish priorities and relationships with the leadership team, faculty, and staff.	Protégé	5.1	6.6
		Mentor	5.4	6.5
		Third Party	3.9	6.1
	How to establish oneself as an instructional leader in the eyes of the staff.	Protégé	5.1	6.6
		Mentor	4.9	6.4
		Third Party	3.3	6.0
	How to hold faculty meetings and how to gradually increase focus on instructional leadership.	Protégé	5.1	6.6
		Mentor	5.4	6.3
		Third Party	3.9	5.8
	How to involve the staff in the decision-making process to increase ownership, including budgetary issues.	Protégé	4.6	6.1
		Mentor	4.6	6.1
		Third Party	3.4	5.6
Planning and Preparation	Preparation for the school year.	Protégé	5.0	6.6
		Mentor	5.5	6.8
		Third Party	3.9	6.1
	How to prepare for state testing and evaluation throughout the school year.	Protégé	5.1	6.7
		Mentor	5.9	6.6
		Third Party	4.3	6.0
	How one would like to move the school forward next year.	Protégé	5.0	6.6
		Mentor	5.4	6.7
		Third Party	3.7	6.3
	How to plan for the closing of the school year.	Protégé	5.3	6.9
		Mentor	5.6	6.9
		Third Party	4.0	6.0
Leadership and Management	General leadership of faculty and staff.	Protégé	4.9	6.4
		Mentor	5.5	6.6
		Third Party	3.6	5.9
	How to address site-based school management teams or site councils.	Protégé	4.7	6.0
		Mentor	5.4	6.4
		Third Party	3.9	6.1
	How to manage time and maintain balance.	Protégé	5.4	6.4
		Mentor	5.3	6.5
		Third Party	4.1	6.1

Appendix B
New Assistant Principal Proficiencies 2008-09

New Assistant Principal Proficiencies		Group	Before Mentoring	After Mentoring
Data Use and Best Practices	Establishing and measuring goals as an assistant principal.	Protégé	3.8	5.2
		Mentor	5.0	6.3
		Third Party	4.1	5.7
	How to analyze, review, and discuss data to prepare strategies with the faculty and staff members for increasing student achievement.	Protégé	4.6	5.5
		Mentor	5.3	6.5
		Third Party	3.8	5.3
	How to learn from the best practices used by other schools/administrators to gain insights.	Protégé	4.3	5.5
		Mentor	5.2	6.8
		Third Party	3.9	5.8
Working Relationship with Staff	How to establish priorities and build relationships with the principal, faculty, and staff.	Protégé	4.9	6.0
		Mentor	5.6	6.6
		Third Party	4.5	6.1
	Knowing and understanding the preferred communication methods of the principal, faculty, and staff.	Protégé	4.3	5.7
		Mentor	5.2	6.6
		Third Party	4.1	5.9
	How to establish oneself as an instructional leader in the eyes of the staff.	Protégé	4.4	5.6
		Mentor	5.2	6.5
		Third Party	3.9	5.7
	How to hold and/or assist with faculty/committee meetings and how to gradually increase focus on instructional leadership.	Protégé	4.5	5.8
		Mentor	5.2	6.7
		Third Party	4.6	5.9
Planning and Preparation	How to prepare for state testing and evaluation throughout the school year.	Protégé	4.6	6.0
		Mentor	4.7	6.5
		Third Party	4.1	6.0
	How to plan for the closing of the school year.	Protégé	4.0	5.2
		Mentor	5.0	6.5
		Third Party	3.4	5.1
Leadership and Management	Understanding the role of the assistant principal.	Protégé	4.1	5.6
		Mentor	5.2	6.6
		Third Party	4.1	5.8
	How to balance all the facts, observations, and viewpoints involved in the decision-making process.	Protégé	4.3	5.5
		Mentor	5.3	6.5
		Third Party	4.5	5.7
	How to manage time and maintain balance.	Protégé	4.1	5.5
		Mentor	5.1	6.4
		Third Party	3.9	5.7
	How to build credibility within the discipline process by balancing empathy and fairness.	Protégé	4.7	5.9
		Mentor	5.2	6.4
		Third Party	4.2	5.8
	How and when to access resources for managing mandates and important duties.	Protégé	3.8	5.3
		Mentor	4.6	6.5
		Third Party	3.8	5.7