

HOW TO BUILD A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Building a mentorship program takes dedicated effort, said Adriana Plach but it is absolutely worth it. She shared some tips for educators who want to begin building partnerships with the professional community.

LOCATING MENTORS

- **Consider your own social and professional networks.** When the program started, Plach said she began with her own network of family, friends and colleagues.
- **Partner with local organizations.** If you have a chamber of commerce or local nonprofit, find opportunities to engage with them and the larger community to get the word out.
- **Reach out to your students' families.** Family members are often looking for ways to stay involved. Mentoring is a great option.

BRINGING MENTORS ON BOARD

- **Make a personal connection.** While email can be a great first step, Plach said she's found the most success with mentor recruitment when she can get on the phone and explain how their program works.
- **Establish a predetermined feedback loop.** Plach said that mentors are often nervous about connecting with high school students; they need support and guidance. Assigning them each a specific point of contact (like a coordinator or teacher) to ask for help makes mentors much more comfortable and likely to say yes.
- **Understand that time is a valuable commodity.** Potential mentors sometimes express concern about the time commitment, Plach said. But they make it clear to mentors that the responsibility of the relationship falls on the students. Students set the meetings and the agendas and drive the conversation. "All we ask is that mentors show up, be honest, and be positive."

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE MENTORSHIP

- **Help keep students accountable.** Plach said this is where they ask for support from the teachers. Once the program begins, teachers hold the students accountable to keep the mentor relationship going and coach them on professional communication skills.
- **Gather feedback.** At the end of each year, Plach sends out a survey to everyone involved. The survey asks what went well and what could go better. Plach said many positive changes they've made to the program have come from recommendations in these surveys.
- **Show appreciation for mentors.** A simple "thank you" for their time goes a long way.

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