

2018-2019

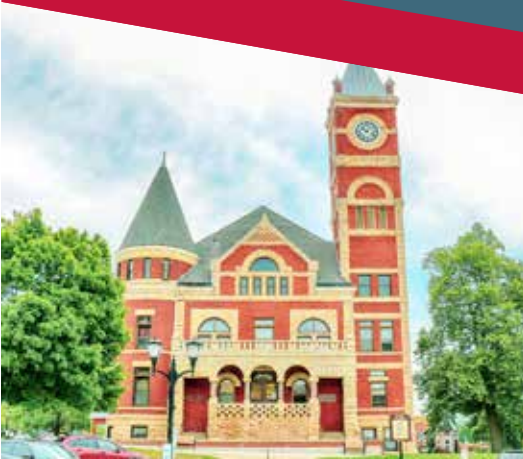
FINAL REPORT

UniverCity Year

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Support and invest: A model for new teacher mentoring in rural schools

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



Acknowledgment and Overview

During the 2018-2019 school year, I have had the privilege of developing a program focused on reducing isolation and increasing support for new teachers in the Juda School District. I want to thank the wonderful administration and staff in Juda for allowing me to be a part of their community. When this project began, I knew rural schools, both in and out of Green County, are challenged with recruiting and retaining teachers. Why teachers don't seek out jobs or stay in rural schools is not quite clear, but this possibly could be contributed to their overall job satisfaction. Efficacy is often linked to being provided with the appropriate support so teachers can feel they can do their job well. Research has also shown that the best level of support comes from other teachers. The district administrator and I also wondered if encouraging investment in the rural community increases a teacher's desire to stay. All these thoughts transformed into the new teacher project in Juda.

The story of three new teachers is likely a common tale across other small schools in Green County. This year Juda had three new teachers, all working in very different roles. We met on a monthly basis and covered a variety of topics pertinent to skills required of new teachers, including classroom management, teacher effectiveness, and teacher leadership. It was a challenge developing a program that fit the needs of three individuals teaching various content. I worked closely with the district administrator to design a program that would focus on strategies which highlighted the strength of these rural communities in an attempt to connect these teachers with the one thing their roles have in common: teaching in a small rural school. Together the teachers and I explored how the rural context presents unique aspects, both encouraging and challenging. Through this project, we discovered the importance of keeping teachers supported and interested by highlighting the positive effect the rural context has on their

teaching practices. My time in Juda has shown me that the school is at the heart of the community and so are the teachers.

I hope this research project will help future individuals who are challenged with creating an effective new teacher mentor program in a small rural school. Below I outline the framework to design the project, discuss program features, and present a modified version of the district's current new mentor program.

Project Framework

In Wisconsin, 77% of the school districts are classified as rural or town districts and these districts enroll 43% of the state's students. Wisconsin's rural public schools are facing declining enrollment, an increase in student poverty, and rising operational costs (Kemp, 2016). Rural schools face continuous struggles with recruiting and retaining teachers (Schafft & Biddle, 2004). Researchers have noted the smaller pool of applicants, fewer benefits, and lower salaries contributing to the shortage of teachers in rural areas (Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013; Zost, 2010). Administrators report that even when they find a teacher, they may not have the ability to hire their first choice, due to competing compensations and locations of other districts. Many rural schools in Wisconsin have been forced to emergency certify teachers in shortage areas.

In order to fill vacant positions, districts are required to hire emergency certified teachers. Since 2012, the number of emergency certified educators throughout Wisconsin, in administrator, pupil services, and teacher categories has increased from 1,126 to 2,659. In 2016-2017 about a third of Wisconsin teachers working under an emergency license were employed by a rural or town district (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018). During that same school year, 84% of rural or town districts had to hire a teacher under an emergency license. Consistently the greatest shortage area is in special education. In fact, 37% of the emergency

certified special education teachers in the state of Wisconsin taught in a rural school. Other certification areas have lower numbers of teachers; however, a large portion of these teachers are working in rural schools compared to non-rural schools. For example, almost half of the emergency certified science teachers also taught in rural schools. Wisconsin's rural schools not only have difficulty filling positions, but also face a high turnover rate of new teachers.

Several factors influence a rural school teacher's decisions to stay or leave. Rural school teachers may feel overwhelmed from the nature of their job, which may require taking on multiple roles. Individuals, like special educators, can feel like they do not have a close network to receive support because they are the sole teacher in that position throughout the entire district (Weiss, Petrin, & Farmer, 2014). Often the best level of support comes from other teachers. Research has shown the extension of a wider social network increases a teacher's level of satisfaction and commitment to their jobs (Berry, 2012).

More recently, researchers are using Social Network Theory to explain certain occurrences within educational practice (Daly, 2010). Social Network Theory becomes a tool for examining how advice and information flow in organizations (Spillane, Healey, & Kim, 2010). The current research suggests that positive school change and reform will come from a school with strong and extended social networks. When a teacher builds a greater social network, they develop more social capital. Some teachers, due to the nature of their teaching position, may have fewer opportunities to interact with a wide range of school colleagues (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016). Relationships with school colleagues, from extended social networks, are the primary resource for social capital in the school (Cross & Sproull, 2004). Sadly, rural teachers fall into this category with a limited social network. This project explored this phenomenon while assisting the Juda school district with the urgent need to support their new teachers.

Previous studies have proven the success of new teacher programs in rural areas. In a series of research studies, Kono (2012) assisted rural school principals to create comprehensive first-year teacher induction programs. These programs focused not only on the professional needs for first-year teachers but their personal needs as well. University researchers in Alaska (Adams & Woods, 2015) partnered with the Department of Education to focus on the low teacher retention rates in the state through mentoring programs. This mentoring program found an increase of teacher efficacy through a focus on teacher strengths, socializing in the community, and being student-focused. An international study conducted in Australia (Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2010) identified a critical time to intervene and provide support to new teachers is right at the first few weeks in their job. All three of these studies provide evidence-based practices and rationale for the creation of this project.

Setting and Participants

This project targeted a small rural district in Green County, Wisconsin. Juda is a farming community located in the southeast quadrant of the county. Juda's enrollment is 305 students, with about a third of students as open enrollments from surrounding districts. The student population is made up of students who identify as white (91.8%), Hispanic (5.9%), two or more races (1.97%), and Pacific Islander (.33%). About 13% of students in the Juda School District have a disability. More than half (64.3%) of students in the district receive free or reduced lunch.

Juda employs 26 teachers. The average years of employment in the district is 15 years. The teacher with the longest service to the district has worked in Juda for 38 years. The administrator in this district has expressed the need for assistance with supporting their new teachers to increase retention. Because of increasing turnover rates, three new teachers were

hired for the 2018-2019 school year in Juda. The three new teachers who participated in this project were the band teacher, agriculture education teacher, and the 4K teacher.

Project Features

Meeting times and topics were chosen based on collaboration between myself, the administrator, and the teachers. The new teachers met on a monthly basis either in person or over a teleconference. Meetings were usually held after school; however, some of the professional development days were utilized as meeting times. One meeting had to be cancelled due to the number of school closing days the district had because of inclement weather. When designing the program, both the individual needs of the teachers and the local context of the Juda School District were carefully considered. Additionally, as a result of this project, the administrator asked for feedback and revisions of the current mentoring protocol they were currently using in the district. Below the project goals, components, and schedule are listed.

Project Goals

1. **This project will aim to increase the social networks of first or second year teachers by establishing a community of practice group for these new teachers in rural Wisconsin.** Feelings of isolation that rural teachers often experience will be eliminated due to the larger network teachers will have to support them in their new roles. The group will work to make early-career teachers feel more supported and efficacious. Ultimately, these rural districts will experience increased retention rates of new hires.
2. **Build capacity of new teachers by facilitating professional development focused on rural specific topics.** Through professional development and group work, the teachers new to the rural districts will be encouraged to utilize the features of the rural school they are now teaching in to facilitate evidence based practices within their classroom.

Teachers will also be provided support on requirements already assigned to them, such as the “effectiveness project.”

Program Components

- A combination of in-person and teleconference meetings
- A guided meeting agenda which includes interactive activities and discussion to address needs of new teachers in the rural school context
- Professional development of rural-specific topics to address the needs of new teachers working in Green County
- Networking events between new teachers in other rural districts
- Opportunities for the new teachers to share their experiences and concerns of teaching in a rural school
- New teachers are assigned a mentor in the district, so this group establishes another source of support for these teacher beyond the mentor/mentee relationship
- Re-occurring feedback from the new teachers on sessions and ongoing support throughout the first school year
- Building skills to increase teacher capacity and autonomy for facilitation of inclusive education practices in their rural classroom and communities
- An online interface to allow teachers to share new information with each other and seek advice on a regular basis from colleagues in neighboring districts

Schedule and topics

Date	Time	Location	Topic
Thursday, August 30 th	Work day meeting 10:00-11:00 a.m.	Juda Office	Introductions
Monday, September 24 th	After school meeting 3:30-5:00 p.m.	Juda Office, Conference Room	Setting Expectations & What is a Rural School Teacher?
Friday, October 26 th	9:15-10:15 a.m.	Juda School, Conference Room	Teacher Effectiveness
Monday, November 26 th	After school meeting 3:30-4:30 p.m.	Teleconference	Teacher Effectiveness
Rescheduled: Wednesday, February 6 th	9:00-11:00 a.m.	Juda School, Conference Room	Classroom Management
<i>Cancelled: Friday, February 22nd</i>	<i>Cancelled</i>	<i>Cancelled</i>	<i>Parent/Family Engagement</i>
Monday, March 25 th	After school meeting 3:30-4:30 p.m.	Teleconference	Networks and Resource Sharing
Monday, April 29 th	After school meeting 3:30-4:30 p.m.	Juda School, Conference Room	Teacher Leadership The Rural Setting: Attributes & Challenges, Place-Based Education

Reflections and Mentoring Program Revisions

While these three new teachers were instructors of various content, their commonality of being rural school teachers strengthened their relationship and support of one another. The topics above seem common to include in a new teacher program, but this project made sure to include times to explore these topics within the rural context. During the very first session we discussed what it meant to be a rural school teacher. The teachers discussed the ways the community was such an intricate part of the school and how that becomes crucial in situating themselves as a new teacher in the district. Throughout the year, the teachers saw how their investment and involvement in the community was directly related to their success as new teachers.

Another unique aspect of being a new teacher in a small rural school that played out in this program was that these teachers were the only teachers in the entire district who were working in this position. Often, the teachers were required to make networks outside of the district lines to seek out information specific to their content area. This group, however, provided support to these teachers within the district as they navigated being a new teacher in Juda together. It was important to keep the context of teaching in a rural school central to the topics discussed in each session because it provided a common space for these new teachers to discuss successes and challenges of being a rural school teacher in Juda. This group also provided a network for these teachers beyond meeting alone with their assigned mentor. I would suggest the continuation of a new teacher group to provide the space for new teachers to feel supported in their roles within the school and community.

Below is a revised version of the new teacher mentoring program. Feedback from teachers was used to make modifications to the current program that the school district had in place. For each meeting, I added a focusing question to center the rural context into the

discussion. The mentor and mentee can use this question to guide the conversation. There are also additional activities added to each meeting that were similar to tasks we completed in our new teacher group. Overall, small rural school districts should consider the importance of their new teachers and the refreshing ideas they bring to their districts. In order for these new teachers to be successful in their jobs, new teachers should be given the tools and autonomy to make instructional decisions which support the community. The school is the heart of the community and continuing a strong investment in new teachers will hopefully contribute to the same involvement new teachers will have in the community for an extended time.

Rural School New Mentor Program

Mentor:	Mentee:
Position:	Position:
Classroom/Office Location:	Classroom/Office Location:
Work email:	Work email:
Personal contact information:	Personal contact information:

Mentor Task Checklist #1	Complete during the first week of school
Date Completed:	
Guiding Questions: What does it mean to be a rural school teacher?	
Information to Review	Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Beginning of the year items: ○ Discuss district mission statement and objectives ○ Discuss teaching standards ○ Review district calendar, marking grading periods, half days, parent conferences, department meetings, grade level meetings and mentor meetings ○ Review the curriculum maps and textbooks ○ Review procedure for hall passes and office referrals ○ Review the student handbook and MS/HS activity code ○ Review teaching schedules and explain duty responsibilities as well as bus duty information, elementary duty rotation, lunch supervision, and hall duties ○ Suggest a format for sub folder/emergency plans ○ Explain lunch time and where it is spent ○ Explain how to access school supplies and paper from office and explain what is available ○ Demonstrate use of laminator/copy machine/fax machine ○ Discuss student discipline procedures and discuss maintaining discipline within classroom ○ Review teacher handbook ○ Discuss evaluation procedure and teacher effectiveness ○ Discuss basic contractual responsibilities/committees/class advisement/other assignments ○ Discuss new materials check-in and budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Treat your protégé to a beverage or snack or lunch ○ Draft a mission statement together in order to establish goals for the year ○ Schedule monthly mentor meetings throughout the year individually and/or with other mentors and mentees ○ Plan how the new teacher will reflect throughout the year and its importance as a first year teacher to Juda Schools
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>	
Important notes from this meeting:	Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>	

Mentor Task Checklist #2	Complete by the end of the second week
Date Completed:	
Guiding Questions: What aspects of a rural school has made your first week challenging or exciting?	
Information to Review	Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss detention procedures and more severe in-school situations ○ Review copy of observation form used by district ○ Review tornado/fire drill signs ○ Discuss FLEX, study hall and computer lab supervision rules ○ Encourage effective ways for contacting parents ○ Discuss lists of sports eligibility and senior privileges ○ Inform mentee of Booster Clubs and its functions ○ Discuss procedures concerning classroom parties and food and beverages in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish a time for informal classroom observations ○ Write a “six word memoir” to discuss how ○ Review mission statement and discuss how this mission statement will be met throughout the year ○ Create a google drive to share documents and information between new teachers and mentor
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>	
Important notes from this meeting:	Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>	

Mentor Task Checklist #3		Complete by September 30 th
Date Completed:		
Guiding Questions: What is the best way to become an effective teacher in a rural school?		
Information to Review		Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss grading polices, retention, and promotion polices ○ Explain progress reports ○ Discuss early release days and staff development days ○ Discuss staff development opportunities/conference attendance ○ Discuss Professional Development Plan ○ Brainstorm possible goals for PDP ○ Discuss availability of outside resources (helpful web sites, professional journals, etc.) for teacher development ○ Review homework polices and grading polices to be sure they are consistent with district polices ○ Review in-school and out-of-school suspension procedures ○ Share ideas for the school newsletter ○ Review FLEX procedures for class meetings and other organizational meetings 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invite the mentee to observe mentor's class ○ Create a list of potential professional development options or goals ○ Establish a timeline and task list to complete any teacher effectiveness requirements this year ○ Discuss and develop an action plan for any specific student needs
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>		
Important notes from this meeting:		Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>		

Mentor Task Checklist #4	Complete by October 15 th
Date Completed:	
Guiding Questions: In what ways are parent and family engagement different in a rural school?	
Information to Review	Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explain conference procedure, give tips on how to make it a positive and productive time ○ Share suggestions from observation exchange ○ Discuss Forward testing procedure and test results and ramifications to district and AYP ○ Discuss differentiation and modification strategies in order to meet the needs of different learning styles ○ Review individual student or family concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Role play a difficult parent encounter ○ Suggest a “practice” before a formal evaluation where a mentor actually observes a mentee’s class of choice ○ Review progress reports together, remind mentee of their due dates
Dates to Remember Faculty meeting: Other:	
Important notes from this meeting:	Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:	

Mentor Task Checklist #5		Complete by November 15 th
Date Completed:		
Guiding Questions: What is the best way to establish a professional network as a teacher in a rural school?		
Information to Review		Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss methods of student evaluation, suggest alternative ways of evaluation such as portfolios, class participation, oral presentations, etc. ○ Discuss problems with the grading procedures and with the posting of 9-weeks grades ○ Discuss the end of the quarter routine, especially with 9-week courses an in MS ○ Discuss the distribution and collection of report cards ○ Suggest a format for a continues teacher portfolio, and then brainstorm possible portfolio artifacts ○ Discuss needs for staff development days particular to mentoring or program needs ○ Encourage mentee to become involved in professional organizations and in community activities and/or volunteerism ○ Identify possible areas in which mentee is in need of improvement 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review teacher evaluation procedures and make suggestions from the “practice” evaluation ○ Draw your professional networks together to show who you go to seek out support and information ○ Develop a list of resources that would benefit the growth of the new teacher’s professional network specifically to their content area (e.g., online forums or CESA groups with surrounding districts) ○ Introduce protégé to the resources people who might be helpful outside of the school to strengthen teaching experience and discuss the use of professional days ○ Check in on progress of teacher effectiveness requirements
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>		
Important notes from this meeting:		Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>		

Mentor Task Checklist #6		Complete by January 15 th	
Date Completed:			
Guiding Questions: How is a teacher challenged and supported with classroom management in a rural setting?			
Information to Review		Tasks to Complete	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss semester end, semester test, posting of grades, and semester grade computation ○ Encourage mentee to attend community and/or student events ○ Discuss make-up work and late work policies and strategies, if problems or questions still exist ○ Review strategies for effective behavior control within classrooms individualizing consequences, if needed ○ Discuss classroom management techniques and areas for improvement in discipling, if problems exist 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review end of semester tasks ○ Visit mentee's class of choice to observe the second time, discuss classroom management needs the mentee would like feedback on ○ Meet with mentee to discuss informal observation ○ Review the mission statement and re-establish second semester goals 	
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>			
Important notes from this meeting:		Special topics of concerns to be discussed:	
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>			

Mentor Task Checklist #7	Complete by February 15 th
Date Completed:	
Guiding Questions: How can curriculum be strengthened through the use of place?	
Information to Review	Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remind of progress reports due date ○ Discuss curriculum maps and areas of changes ○ Discuss lesson pacing ○ Review teacher standards and discuss areas of success and improvement ○ Discuss professional portfolio updating ○ Discuss budgeting procedures for the next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outline a lesson plan or unit that would utilize place-based education strategies ○ Check in on progress of teacher effectiveness requirements and encourage defining areas for development
<p>Dates to Remember</p> <p>Faculty meeting:</p> <p>Other:</p>	
Important notes from this meeting:	Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
<p>Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:</p>	

Mentor Task Checklist #8	Complete by March 15 th
Date Completed:	
Guiding Questions: What keeps teachers wanting to stay teaching in a rural school?	
Information to Review	Tasks to Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss time management and risk of burnout ○ Remind mentee of end of quarter grades due date ○ Share ideas for professional growth/development for summer or next school year ○ Discuss year end retention/promotion schoolwide polices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Give mentee something green for March 17th ○ Invite mentee to visit your classroom again ○ Set end of year mentor/mentee meeting
Dates to Remember Faculty meeting: Other:	
Important notes from this meeting:	Special topics of concerns to be discussed:
Date of next scheduled mentor/mentee meeting:	

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About UniverCity Year



UniverCity Year is a three-phase partnership between UW-Madison and one community in Wisconsin. The concept is simple. The community partner identifies projects that would benefit from UW-Madison expertise. Faculty from across the university incorporate these projects into their courses, and UniverCity Year staff provide administrative support to ensure the collaboration's success. The results are powerful. Partners receive big ideas and feasible recommendations that spark momentum towards a more sustainable, livable, and resilient future. Join us as we create **better places together**.



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