

## Mentoring Guidelines

Partnerships that support students and their projects are a critical part of the Texas Performance Standards Project. One goal of the project is that participating students experience real-life, complex explorations and produce a final project that is comparable to a product produced by a professional in the field. As the guide with that kind of experience, the mentor has a responsibility and a special role to play in the development of the student.

Many kinds of mentoring models exist. Different mentors take on different roles or combinations of roles. Some of these roles include coach, expert, and buddy. At various times, you may choose to take some or all of these approaches to mentoring. At times, you may give guidance, acting in the expert role. At other times, you may encourage your protégé to solve problems independently by asking questions to stimulate thinking, acting in the coaching role.

The student who is asking you to be his or her mentor likely has many, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- Sustained curiosity, interest, and focus
- Minimal challenge by traditional curricula or teaching methods
- An intense interest in specific areas
- An extensive vocabulary in the field of interest
- Personal responsibility and autonomy

Effective mentoring is based on building a trusting relationship between the mentor and protégé. Some tips for building a trusting relationship include:

- Understanding the roles of all project participants
- Establishing goals for the project and your role in it
- Establishing ground rules for the relationship; for example, frequency of meetings, length of meetings, preferred methods of communication during the periods between meetings, emergency contact methods
- Setting a purpose for each meeting. (In the beginning, you may assume more of this responsibility, but, as the project progresses, your protégé may take on more of this responsibility.)
- Establishing realistic, yet challenging, expectations for your protégé
- Maintaining the confidentiality of your protégé
- Recognizing the individual needs of your protégé. (Each student has unique interests, needs, and levels of maturity that will affect the student's need for support.)
- Building rapport with the student
- Being an advocate for your protégé
- Implementing effective communication with other project participants, including handling tensions that may arise
- Disengaging from the mentoring relationship when necessary
- Benefiting from your role as mentor

Mentors may use many strategies in helping their protégés with their projects, such as:

- Helping the protégé identify a question or topic for exploration that optimizes his or her chances for success. The topic should be of sufficient interest to the student to hold the student's interest for the specified period of time. Topics or questions should be narrow enough to allow for thorough exploration in the time allowed.
- Encouraging the participation of protégés in a variety of professional opportunities, including opportunities to observe and interview other professionals
- Using time with your protégé by effectively engaging in structured, meaningful activities
- Using technology to facilitate effective communication with your protégé. E-mail and telephone can be useful tools.
- Respecting the confidentiality of protégés
- Seeking assistance from the teacher if a mentoring relationship does not appear to be working
- Becoming familiar with the requirements of the project, as stated in the timelines and in the scoring guide, and help your protégé learn to evaluate his/her own progress using those tools
- Being willing to provide feedback and share professional practices with protégés
- Offering support, but letting your protégé do the work

Mentors often ask about the level of collaboration with their protégés. In general, the kind of partnership you establish with your protégé should reflect accepted practices in your field. However you and your protégé decide to work, your protégé's final product and supporting documentation must be solely the student's work.

You are serving as a role model to your protégé. You may be the first professional your protégé has observed in a role that he or she may assume some day. The following guidelines may help if you feel uncomfortable with being a role model:

- Don't be afraid to let your protégé know you're human
- Demonstrate commitment to your own professional growth and learning
- Be proud of the effort you are making to share your field with an interested student
- Keep a journal or log to track of your protégé's progress