

RELAY/GSE



Selection Toolkit for School-Based Mentor Teachers

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Toolkit Overview

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide schools, districts, and networks with the tools required to plan for the school-based mentor experience meaningfully, an integral part of teacher preparation. The tools are designed to serve as a guide as you create or revise your current school-based mentor teacher structures and selections, ensuring that Relay students and school-based mentor teachers are set up for success. As you plan, connect with your Relay Clinical Practice Director to discuss questions, opportunities, and challenges that arise from your specific context.

School-Based Mentor Teacher Responsibilities

School-based mentors are critical for Relay students' success. For example, the National Council for Teacher Quality (2020) highlighted that "First-year teachers can be as effective as typical third-year teachers if those new teachers spent their student teaching experience in the classroom of a highly effective teacher" (p. 4). Even in cases where Relay students are not embedded in the classroom of a school-based mentor (i.e., for students not enrolled in residency or Teacher Pathway programs), observations of and coaching from a strong school-based mentor are critical. Given this, Relay collaborates with partners on the selection, training, and support of school-based mentor teachers for students enrolled in certification programs.

Relay students should have a school-based mentor teacher when required by the state for certification and if they are enrolled in year 1 of a residency or NY Teacher Pathway program, regardless of state requirements. Remember that students enrolled in a residency or NY Teacher Pathway program are those hired by a partner school and spend their first year working in a birth–grade 12 school as an apprentice, gradually taking on more responsibility throughout the year as they develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to lead their own classrooms as full-time teachers.

Regardless of the program a Relay student is enrolled in, observations of and coaching from a strong school-based mentor teacher are critical. All school-based mentor teachers should regularly observe and coach mentees, provide opportunities for mentees to observe a variety of strong teachers across their certification area, and meet any additional [state requirements for school-based mentor teachers](#).

School-Based Mentor Teachers for Residents and Teacher Pathway Students

School-based mentors for residents/apprentice teachers have additional responsibilities, outlined below:

- **Co-Teaching:** From day one, establish a classroom culture in which residents and apprentice teachers are seen as co-teachers, which sets the resident or apprentice teacher up for success as they take on more responsibility over the year.
- **Modeling:** Observations of school-based mentors and other teachers are a key factor in the success and development of residents and apprentice teachers. Residents/apprentice teachers should observe a strategic diversity of strong teachers in action, observing their school-based mentor or another teacher daily for at least one instructional block before the point near the end of the year where they are teaching full lessons throughout the day.

- **Coaching:** School-based mentors for residents and apprentice teachers provide ongoing support by checking in with them for 30–60 minutes each week. This time should be spent coaching the resident/apprentice teacher, including the internalization of lesson materials for the upcoming week, even if the resident/apprentice teacher is not yet responsible for teaching full lessons. Residents and apprentice teachers will use school-based mentors’ lesson plans for practice during Clinical Practice classes.
- **Communication:** School-based mentors will communicate with Relay about the progress and performance of residents/apprentice teachers at school. Relay’s faculty will keep the mentor teachers informed about residents’ and apprentice teachers’ learning and upcoming Relay assessment requirements.
- **Feedback and Gateway Scoring:** School-based mentors should use weekly meetings as an opportunity to provide residents/apprentice teachers with instructional and professional feedback and solicit feedback and input from the resident/apprentice teacher. As primary coaches at the school level, school-based mentors should observe residents and apprentice teachers in the classroom and provide concrete action steps to support their consistent growth as teachers. School-based mentors will also be asked to formally score residents/apprentice teachers on the Gateway rubrics, providing a school perspective on their progress to date.

School-Based Mentor Teacher Role Considerations

Depending on the state, mentor teachers may hold different instructional roles within the school, but should have some classroom teaching responsibilities. Please consult your [state’s requirements for mentor teachers](#) first and foremost when hiring mentor teachers. If your state offers some flexibility in role type, you may also consider the following guidance:

School-Based Mentor Teacher Model	Model Description
Classroom Teacher as School-Based Mentor Teacher	The school-based mentor teacher is a strong classroom teacher with both the capacity to coach and serve as a model instructor. Residents in this model are embedded in the mentor teacher’s classroom and receive observations, feedback, and coaching from the mentor teacher.
Dean or Instructional Coach as School-Based Mentor Teacher	The Relay student is managed directly by a dean or instructional coach, who also serves as their mentor teacher. Residents in this model should still have a “home base” classroom with a strong classroom teacher, but they would receive observations, feedback, and coaching from the dean or instructional coach serving as the school-based mentor.
Grade / Department Lead with a Home-Base School-Based Mentor Teacher	For non-residents, this model is similar to the dean or instructional coach model, but with a grade or department lead as the mentor teacher. For residents in this model, the resident would work with two to three teachers within a department or grade level, with one of the teachers designated as the “home base” and primary school-based mentor. The primary school-based mentor is responsible for the resident’s overall development; however, the resident may also receive regular observations, feedback, and coaching from multiple teachers.

School-Based Mentor Teacher Selection: Readiness Assessment

All school-based mentor teachers should be strong educators who demonstrate culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Again, depending on the state, mentor teachers may have specific requirements for serving in this role. Please consult [your state's requirements for mentor teachers](#) first and foremost when hiring mentor teachers. Additionally, school-based mentor teachers should be the strongest educators in your building, who can model best practices.

At a minimum, prospective school-based mentor teachers should meet the following criteria:

- Minimum of three years of teaching experience
- Minimum of one year of experience at the school site
- Proven record of strong results with students
- Demonstration of culturally responsive and inclusive practices
- Strong content and pedagogical content knowledge for the grade(s) and subject(s) that they will be mentoring
- A desire to mentor and support aspiring or early-career teachers
- For residents' mentors: A willingness and capacity to share instructional space and instructional time to support the residents' growth

When hiring, we recommend that you consider the following:

- Relevant student achievement results to ensure all prospective candidates have a proven record of strong results with students
- Relevant student experience data to ensure all prospective candidates have created culturally relevant and inclusive environments for students
- Data from an up-to-date observation of the prospective school-based mentor teacher
 - Optional: Use [this set of prioritized rows from the Danielson Framework for Teaching](#), which are foundational to Clinical Practice courses in year one of all Relay programs, when you observe.
- Recent lesson and unit plans from the prospective school-based mentor to familiarize yourself with their content planning and pedagogy
- An informal conversation with the prospective school-based mentor teacher to gauge interest and capacity

After gathering this essential information, use a readiness assessment tool like the one that follows to formatively assess the candidate in four essential areas: Content, General Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Mindsets and Practices, and Organization and Capacity. For each sub-category, rate on a scale, such as the 0-4 scale included in this example:

Score:	Performance Level:	Overview:
0	Not Present	The candidate's skills are lacking in this category. There is no evidence of the skill.
1	Insufficient Performance *(Danielson: Unsatisfactory)	The candidate attempts to demonstrate this skill but is not successful, or there is little evidence. There may be a misconception or gap holding the candidate back.
2	Emerging performance *(Danielson: Basic)	The candidate is beginning to demonstrate this skill. While there may be some evidence of the skill, the candidate may not consistently demonstrate it or may miss opportunities to showcase it.

3	Proficient Performance *(Danielson: Proficient)	The candidate demonstrates proficiency in this skill. There is evidence that the candidate is able to demonstrate the skill consistently. The candidate has or would likely be able to teach others this skill.
4	Exemplary Performance *(Danielson: Distinguished)	The candidate is exemplary in this skill. There is ample evidence that the candidate can consistently demonstrate this skill. The candidate is a leader in this skill and would be able to model and teach the skill to others.

*Relay uses the Danielson Framework for Teaching for observations of students in Clinical Practice courses. Therefore, for many of the categories that follow, we are also providing a link to a Danielson rubric row that you can optionally use to formatively assess performance, which can enhance alignment between mentor teacher selection and Relay programs.

Sample Candidate Readiness Assessment:

Note: The language for each row that includes a linked Danielson rubric row below comes from the [Danielson Framework for Teaching](#), which Relay uses for feedback on student observations and reflective journals.

Content	Performance Level
Applies knowledge of content and pedagogy to support student learning Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 1a) to rate this skill	
Plans coherent instruction for the content area Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 1e) to rate this skill	
Communicates about purpose and content Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 3a) to rate this skill	
Engages students in learning the content Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 3c) to rate this skill	

General Pedagogy	Performance Level
Cultivates a respectful and affirming environment Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 2a) to rate this skill	
Maintains a purposeful environment Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 2c) to rate this skill	
Supports positive student behavior Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 2d) to rate this skill	
Uses assessment for student learning Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 3d) to rate this skill	
Responds flexibly to student needs Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 3e) to rate this skill	

Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Mindsets and Practices	Performance Level
Knows and values students: Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 1b) to rate this skill	
Engages in reflective practice Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 4a) to rate this skill	
Engages families and communities: Optional: Use the Danielson rubric (component 4c) to rate this skill	
Desires to mentor and coach others in the way that: - Cultivates a collaborative and asset-based relationship - Builds a supportive and reciprocal environment around feedback	

For mentors of residents: Situate the resident as a co-teacher in the classroom community and engage the resident in collaborative planning for the classroom and community.	
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Organization and Capacity	Performance Level
Effectively uses an organizational system to balance workload	
Consistently follows through on all asks and deadlines.	
For mentors of residents: Has the capacity (or capacity can be created) to meet with a resident for collaborative planning, coaching, and feedback for approximately 60 minutes a week.	

Optional: Fill out the last section based on candidate experience, knowing that it is essential to success in the role, but not a prerequisite, because Relay will provide training on these skills :

Coaching & Developing Novice Teachers	Performance Level
Collects concrete evidence of both strengths and areas for growth when observing novice teachers	
Selects high-leverage feedback for novice teachers	
Clearly delivers high-leverage feedback and supports accountability for follow-through.	
Analyzes data and student work to generate meaningful action steps	

Readiness Assessment Trends:

Transfer the score from the readiness assessment to the table below. Identify the key trends that you notice about the candidate's current performance:

Category	Recommended Minimum Score*	Candidate Score
Content	12	____/16
General Pedagogy	15	____/20
Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Mindsets & Practice	12	____/16
Organization & Capacity	9	____/12
Optional: Coaching & Developing Novice Teachers	12	____/16

*Note: The Danielson rubric is quite rigorous, so if you used the linked Danielson rows to formatively assess candidates, if a promising candidate falls below the minimum due to 1-2 scores of emerging/basic performance, you might still consider hiring them. Use the readiness assessment reflection questions that follow to help make this decision.

Readiness Assessment Reflection Questions:

- Given the performance levels in each category, is your candidate ready to be a school-based mentor teacher?
- If the prospective school-based mentor teacher is below proficient in any category, is the gap coachable? Are there other teachers or instructional leaders in the building who could support the novice teacher in this area?

3. In what areas does the prospective school-based mentor teacher likely need support? What resources and structures exist to intentionally develop the school-based mentor teacher's coaching and core skills throughout the year?

School-Based Mentor Teacher Selection: Interview Questions

To ensure a fair, competitive, and equitable selection process and to ensure prospective school-based mentor teachers are genuinely invested in the work, partners may opt for an application process. If you are considering this route, please find sample questions that Relay believes could help ensure that school-based mentor teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and mindsets for the role. Questions in bold are most essential.

1. How many years of full-time teaching experience do you have?
2. What experience (if any) do you have mentoring and coaching novice teachers?
3. What do you consider to be your strengths as an instructor and a teammate? What are your goals to push your practice in the upcoming school year?
4. Why do you want to coach novice teachers, and how do you expect being a school-based mentor teacher will help you grow professionally?
5. Novice teachers must get consistent exposure to strong teaching from their school-based mentor teacher. Explain your record of results with students. What teacher actions do you think impacted these results?
6. How do you cultivate a culturally responsive and inclusive classroom environment?
7. What steps would you take to build a relationship with your mentee?
8. What skills do you believe are most essential for novice teachers and why? What would you prioritize in supporting your mentee?
9. What skills do you believe are most essential for effective coaching of novice teachers, and why? How will you build those skills, and what type of support would you need?
10. How would an administrator or colleague describe you as a teacher?

School-Based Mentor Teacher Scheduling and Incentives

Given school and district-specific contexts, Relay generally lets partners determine the specifics for school-based mentor teacher scheduling and incentives. We do have a few core recommendations, however, to ensure that the role of the school-based mentor teacher is prestigious, rewarding, and a strong source of development for both the mentor teacher and the Relay student. These recommendations stem from our evolution and experience as a program, as well as from partnerships where we have seen school-based mentor teachers emerge as key drivers in novice teacher development. Your Relay Clinical Practice Director can help you brainstorm ideas to maximize opportunities and mitigate challenges specific to your school and district, with these best practices in mind.

Scheduling

At a minimum, school-based mentor-teacher schedules should include the following features:

- Regular time for the Relay student to observe the mentor teacher
 - For residents, this should occur at least once a day and include opportunities for the resident to take on additional responsibilities in the mentor teacher's classroom throughout the year.

- A regular time for the school-based mentor teacher to observe the Relay student teaching
 - For residents, this should be a minimum of 30 minutes a week
- Regular time for meetings for co-planning, feedback, and other coaching and support activities
 - For residents, this should be about 60 minutes a week

In addition, Relay also recommends:

- Pairing the school-based mentor teacher with an instructional coach who can support the mentor teacher in their coaching and modeling of instruction
- Opportunities for instructional coaches or principals to co-observe with the mentor teacher to align on strengths, areas for growth, and high-leverage feedback for the Relay student
- Built-in release time for school-based mentor teacher training. Relay provides training and support to mentor teachers as they develop into effective coaches. Aligning with Relay on release time ensures that school-based mentor teachers view this as part of their role and something of great value, both to their development and to the school.
- Relieving school-based mentor teachers of additional responsibilities. Mentor teachers can experience challenges when juggling additional duties at the school site and the needs of the novice teacher they are supporting. Balancing their schedules to ensure they have sacred time each week to devote to coaching ensures they have the space to develop and support their mentees effectively.

Incentives:

As a graduate school, Relay is unable to compensate school-based mentor teachers. However, schools or districts may wish to compensate mentor teachers, and Relay fully endorses this decision. School-based mentor teachers are instrumental in both a novice teacher's development and in determining whether they stay in the profession and at a particular school site. Mentor teachers work every week to model excellent teaching, observe their mentees, have weekly coaching meetings, and provide morale support as novice teachers get acclimated to the profession.

If schools or districts can fully compensate mentor teachers for their work, we recommend doing so. Suppose mentor teachers do not have sheltered coaching time baked into their schedule. In that case, we recommend calculating compensation by assuming one hour of coaching responsibility per week and using the hourly professional wage designated by your district.

When mentor teacher responsibilities are already baked into the schedule and so require limited time outside of school, Relay recommends a small token of appreciation for mentor teachers from schools or districts. Most partners compensate mentor teachers between \$500 and \$2000 per year.

Many partners have found success in distributing the stipend over time and issuing it based on the performance of both the mentor teacher and the mentee. This could mean:

- Initial Stipend – Beginning-of-year placement stipend, issued immediately after the school-based mentor orientation.
- Midyear stipend – Midyear stipend after a midyear observation of the novice teacher
- End-of-year stipend – End-of-year stipend aligned to an end-of-year observation and/or a resident's hiring as a full-time teacher of record.