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Susan Marie Bollinger
University of the Incarnate Word

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MENTORING AS A MINISTRY

A Pastoral Project
presented to the Pastoral Institute,
University of the Incarnate Word,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Religious Studies

by

Susan Marie Bollinger, B.S., M.Ed.

Approved by:

Dr. L. Scott Ryan, aa v1
Faculty Advisor

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My Theology of Church and Ministry

My journey began to unfold when I discovered that the Christian life is not a solitary life but a life that leads us into a fellowship of community that we Christians call “the Church.” Years ago, while on a vacation, I looked at the Grand Canyon with its spectacular and inspiring natural features. I was spellbound. I faced a beauty like nothing I had ever seen before. There are no words to fully describe this truly amazing example of God's work. I knew my life would never be the same. Everywhere I looked, I realized that I was looking at the face of God right there in the glory of the universe. I had to share this.

I realized at that moment just how enormous is God. He is everywhere and everywhere is holy. I believed God was trying to spark a conversation with me. I just did not know how to respond. The concept was just too much for me to consider. Somehow, I knew from the core of my being that I was about to get to know God better. Years later, I began to accept his call. I returned to school to study theology.

My awakening was long and hard, but eventually, toward the end of my teaching career, I came face-to-face with my new calling and new purpose in life. My friends and family thought this was a wonderful idea—that I should answer God's calling to enter the ministry and to study theology.

I was excited with my new-found thirst for developing my theological ministry. I grew more eager to learn about the Church and my new ministry. My desire is to improve myself by gaining new knowledge and to serve God by helping others. I wanted to have a positive impact on my world. When I began going to school, many new challenges arose. I encountered new thoughts about God, Jesus, the Church and ministry. I was becoming

more mature and harmonious with my new-found knowledge. This was such an enjoyable part of my life that I spent many hours talking about my classes with my husband.

During my studies, I realized that many times the word "church" is both a familiar and misunderstood word. According to Millard Erickson, a noted theologian, the word is one of the few aspects of Christian theology that can be observed and where Christianity is encountered (1026). The word "church" can and has caused misunderstandings concerning what the church is and what it stands for. The term is used in many ways depending upon context. It may refer to the architectural structure of a building, or a particular body of believers or denomination or it can stand for the body of Christ. In the confusion generated by the indiscriminate use of the term church, there is evidence of a more powerful issue: the lack of understanding of the basic nature of the church (Erickson, 1026).

To examine the nature of the church, we must understand its history and the relationship between its followers and Jesus during the early years of the church. In the beginning, the followers of Jesus became "church." We find this in the Acts of the Apostles when the Gentiles and Jews were converted to Christianity and these individuals were led into a collective of fellowship with others like themselves that became known as "the Church." According to John Dwyer, a church historian, church history begins with Jesus because "the church" is the collection of groups of those who took Jesus' teachings and his life seriously (5).

When we look in the Bible for additional evidence of the nature of the church during the early period of church history, the term is used in the New Testament in the

sense of the Kingdom, the Way and the Word. The image of the body of Christ also is connected to the term “the church.” Paul used the phrase “with Christ” or “in Christ” when referring to believers and the church many times.

The image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church (Erickson, 1037). In I Corinthians 12, St. Paul refers to this interconnectedness of the body in terms of the Spirit and stresses that each believer is to be dependent upon each other in a connecting way as a community. Paul maintains in his writings that all are members, though many are one body within/with Christ. This one body represents the solidarity of “The Church.”

Since the beginning, the tasks of the church and its community were to remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles and to present these teachings to the world around them without fail. Erickson states that the church was not brought into being by Jesus simply to exist as an end in itself but it was to fulfill Jesus' ministry by his followers (1051). As the community of followers grew, the church and its ministry became a reality. Each member had a ministry that was designed to fulfill a certain task in relation to the functioning of the church. Some of these roles were as the elders, deacons and bishops that ensure the functioning of the church. Others were to simply spread the Word.

Each community member during the early church accepted his/her mission and ministry by trusting in God's will. Each new member was impressed by the Christian community life, with its strong emphasis on family, on the charity to others in the name of the church and the mission of Jesus. Many were attracted to this way of life and this led newcomers into a collective of believers who wanted to be a part of this new

movement.

The Acts of the Apostles reminds Jesus' followers that they are on a mission to work together as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do God's will. Those who obey in spreading the word will be under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit as they follow God's plan as God's witnesses. Jesus regarded evangelism as a ministry. Trusting in God was part of this new-found ministry. Important to this ministry was the need to educate and instruct the official pastor and teacher of the church so the church community in turn would become educated and be a part of the ministry. The church was responsible for teaching scripture to the community and for ensuring the understanding of the biblical message. According to Erickson, in biblical times the church gathered for worship and instruction and then went out to evangelize fellow Christians and non-Christians (1057). There was a great need for both evangelizing and instructing those who yearned to know more and help make the church grow as God intended.

The Church and the ministry changed many times through its history. The Church survived external hardships such as persecutions and famines as well as internal upheavals, such as schisms and heresies. The solidarity of the Church's early Fathers kept the Church and its ministry on course with its focus on God's will through the Holy Spirit.

As changes emerged through the years, especially those after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, many new visions came into being. As the lay members of the church community were called to Christ's discipleship, they began to develop their own vocations in their own ministries and it became the Church's mission to support each member's efforts to find their way by experiencing God's will in their life. James and

Evelyn Whitehead, consultants in ministry education, stated that each member in the church community should review his or her own theological reflections on ministry by confronting his or her own personal experiences that are triggered by their own pastoral concerns in their parish community(43).

Change is fundamental to the universe and that includes religion. The Catholic Church over the years has moved from having the priest doing all the sacred rites as well as running the day-to-day business of the church, to having many ministries to help run the parish and assist those in need within the church and outside of the immediate church community, relieving the priest for roles traditionally reserved to the priest. According to the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, the Church was grateful to the lay members of the Church who responded to the call to minister in great numbers. Without them the church would have been greatly diminished (USCCB 61).

Many felt that the ministry of the Catholic Church had lost its grounding and strength and that this was why the Council of Bishops were making an outcry for more of the faithful to join the ministry community. According to the Whiteheads, however, others felt that this initial enthusiasm for shared ministry has mellowed because of the many differences that made for ongoing disagreements, making it difficult to work together (89).

The Church was aware that some parishes had better human resources and policies for their ministry programs to be successful. The Church established ways to address problems by developing policies to inspire and improve the different ministries so they could flourish and nourish the community.

Ministry is seen as a gift for the community which extends beyond the personal

call of individuals. A ministry community is a group in which shared values that lead to a common action that is done in the spirit of mutual concern. The members of the team share and work together which becomes effective and enjoyable (Whitehead & Whitehead, 95). If a ministry community is strong, it will become successful, especially if the community can learn to live with its tensions and differences and accept their pastoral tasks with God's blessing.

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Proposed Project

Mentoring New Teachers as a Ministry

This project will take place during the 2006 and 2007 school years. I will be mentoring seven new teachers at the Medina Valley High School for two years. This program is in part a result of the No Child Left Behind Act. It is designed to reduce premature “leakage” from the profession of disillusioned new teachers by providing teachers with a trusted, supportive leadership and to ensure that the new teachers will grow in their profession to benefit their students, school and community. I will also provide spiritual support when needed and asked. I will maintain communications and meet with my assigned teachers and high school coordinators on a regular basis.

I will develop my focus group to help complete the planning of my project and give me ideas on how I should implement the project so it will fulfill the spiritual and educational needs of the project.

I will observe each first year teacher formally three times a semester in addition to meeting with each teacher regularly to discuss his or her progress. For the second year teachers, I plan to decrease the amount of time I will be spending with them unless I am told to do otherwise. I intend to establish a trusting relationship with each teacher and I will maintain confidentiality for anything they discuss with me unless it will bring harm to them, the school, or the students.

I will have my new teachers complete a needs assessment questionnaire to see

where they stand as a new teacher and in what areas they might need more support. The responses from these will help guide my planning for the year.

I plan on meeting with the new teachers at the beginning of the school year together with other teachers from the faculty to establish a sense of community, teamwork and unity among the new teachers and the rest of the faculty. I anticipate a need to demystify some aspects of the profession by frankly discussing some of the issues that aren't talked about in college classes, such as specific discipline issues and the politics of a school district. Perhaps, if the new teacher does not have to discover these things on their own, their first experience will not be so traumatic.

The teacher-mentor evaluation will be developed by me and the rest of the district mentors. It will be a two-part survey which each new teacher will complete at the end of the school year. The first part will be the linear scale type of questions and the second part will contain open-ended questions that the teacher can respond to more fully. Information from the survey will be used to improve the program and guide the mentors.

Project Proposal

1

Medina Valley Independent School District encompasses 296 square miles; 286 in Medina County and 10 in Bexar County. Medina Valley ISD provides the educational facilities and resources to meet the needs of approximately 3,000 students on six campuses. It is currently classified as a UIL Five-A district. The district was formed in 1959 by the consolidation of the schools of Castroville and La Coste. The boundaries of Medina Valley ISD extend north to the Medina Lake area, south to Lytle and Natalia, west toward Hondo, and east to San Antonio.

The district has three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, for a total of six schools within the district. The Medina Valley I.S.D. employs about two hundred fifty teachers and with support staff it has a total of four hundred thirty personnel. The ethnic breakdown for students in the district is 44.0% White, 53.2% Hispanic and 0.13% Other.

Medina Valley High School is located at 8565 FM 471 Castroville, Texas 78009. The High School employs about sixty-seven teachers and one principal, one assistant principal, and two vice principals. The High School attendance numbers are just large enough to make it a Five-A school, roughly eleven hundred students. The High School offers various types of programs from college-bound classes to vocational classes. The High School also offers other types of programs for those students with special learning

needs. The school also offers English as a second language classes, gifted and talented programs, migrant programs and credit recovery programs. They also provide many types of clubs for the students such as The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, chess clubs, debate clubs, even robotics.

Castroville is a historic small town nestled in the Medina River Valley which is fifteen miles west of San Antonio. Castroville is rich in history. The town was founded in 1844 by Henri Castro and a small band of colonists that were mostly from Alsace, France. Many of the local people who have family that have lived in this area since it was first settled still speak Alsatian. Many of the older homes now belong to the Texas historical society. The St. Louis Catholic Church, built in 1870, is one of the oldest churches in Medina County.

2

Mr. Murray, the district's superintendent, had been concerned that many new teachers to the district were not staying beyond their first year. Whether that was a result of inconsistent training or factors related to the district itself, even he didn't know. Teachers can either be trained and certified by the state or via an alternative certification company that didn't, among other things, run their students through student teaching. The No Child Left Behind Act required, but didn't pay for, mentoring of all first year teachers. The district got a grant from the state that would cover some of the costs. We concluded that if the first year teachers were made to feel a part of the community more quickly, made to feel more comfortable with the rules, written and unwritten of teaching, they would be encouraged to remain with the district and the career. Thus was my mentoring project born.

3

I gathered a focus group, made up of Mr. Chase, my Principal, Dora Zamzoe and Debbie Haby, mentors to other campuses, Eva English and David Bollinger, a teacher's aide and an experienced teacher respectively. My professional and personal relationship with each, their willingness to be involved and their range of experience all contributed to their choice.

4

I asked all the new hires each of the two years, via a survey, about their needs, such as learning what is expected of them as a teacher, learning where and how to obtain supplies and instructional materials, how to assist students with special needs and how to complete administrative paperwork. All responded with an average of "very high need" in every category of question.

5

My focus group contributed to the design of the survey, offered suggestions and helped make arrangements for regular meetings with the new teachers and activities during inservice days.

6

The district supplied a set of goals to all the mentors. They wanted to welcome and support our new professionals. They wanted to provide moral and emotional support. The Superintendent felt that they needed to provide resources, focus and direction in the classroom by encouraging the implementation of effective teaching strategies.

I added my own goals, given the focus of this project. I especially wanted to be prepared as a lay minister, when the opportunity arose, to explain the Word of God. I felt

it to be important to be a facilitator of opportunity, supplying assistance to the new teacher when asked, or when I saw the need. I'd already seen the need to serve as a go-between for the administration and sometimes-shy teachers. As a retired teacher, I wanted to offer my twenty-plus years of experience to support and strengthen their teaching. To accomplish these, I needed to become a good listener, maintain confidentiality and develop a trusting relationship with the new teachers.

Timelines for this type of project are difficult to isolate for each goal. However, the opinion of the government and the district was that if a new teacher survived two years of teaching, they would likely remain in the profession as a valuable and effective teacher.

7

As a means of accomplishing these goals, I determined to schedule and manage an "Initiation" meeting with the new teachers during inservice week. I would invite two or more experienced teachers to help me explain some of the unwritten culture of the district: who were the go-to people when the new teacher needed things; what were the procedures for requesting supplies; how to use the computerized grading and attendance system; what were the district's policies regarding discipline and the like.

I intended to meet with the new teachers frequently at first, observe them when they could be comfortable and gradually visit with them at longer and longer intervals. I could then offer tips and pointers based on what I'd seen. I had a list of specific things I wanted to be sure I discussed with each new teacher. Finally, I needed to meet formally with each teacher twice a year over a two year period. During the last meeting of the year, I planned to administer a survey to obtain feedback on my own performance and

suggestions for changes to the program.

8

I have over twenty years of experience as a special education teacher, coincidentally including counseling and listening skills finely honed for handling emotional students. I had some education supervision courses during my previous Masters degree and I knew that I would need special communication skills. So, I took the Communication Skills and Pastoral Counseling courses to prepare.

9

This project was going to test my interpersonal skills very thoroughly. If I am to become a minister, these skills will be essential to success in that regard. I am naturally outgoing and able to work easily with a wide variety of people in a wide variety of roles. I sometimes have difficulty clearly communicating my ideas and I know I will need to learn more effective communication styles. I am a good listener, but I can sometimes become distracted into my own parallels with what I'm hearing and so lose focus.

10

A mentor must be confident and firm while remaining friendly. If a mentor seems insecure, trust is lost and their mentorship will be ineffective. At the same time, if a new teacher needs correction, the mentor's role can be to supply that correction before management gets involved. If the mentor isn't respected, the new teacher is less likely to accept the mentor's advise and wisdom. There must be a sense of authority within a velvet glove, a gentle guiding hand.

11

I was able, on a number of occasions, to rally other teachers in the same core

subject area to become friends with and support my new teachers, ensuring an ongoing source of support even after I was gone. Unfortunately, the state grant ran its course and the district is ignoring the requirements of NCLB in this area by shifting the mentor role, on paper, to the department chairs. In my opinion, the department chairs are a poor choice for the job. They have no training and have many other issues on their plates which they consider to be much more important. Still, I have friends who've reported that the tradition of supporting their new neighbors has taken hold and is ongoing. One of my teachers went on to become the KENS5 Teacher of the Year.

12

Most people simply hear the other person. What is needed is better listening. I learned how important it is to really listen to the person, to work to sense the meaning behind their words. A minister of the Word listens as much as speaks. It seems to me that both skills are paramount. During my recent family troubles, my strengthened listening skills were a great help to me in surviving that period.

13

Mr. Chase, the High School Principal, was my resource person. I needed his permission and support to be on campus and to work with the teachers. His approval gave me the initial credibility I needed to start with each new teacher. It kept me from being just another "expert" from Region XX [Education Service Center 20—In public education in Texas, the state is divided into districts, each with an ESC that provides the material and services a single school district couldn't ordinarily afford to keep on hand. In recent years, the ESC's have become a centralized source of consultant expertise.]

Project Process-Mentoring as a Ministry

This project I became involved with was a district wide project to mentor teachers new to the district that were teaching for the first time, as opposed to new hires from other districts who had teaching experience. My superintendent approached me and asked if I would like to be a teacher mentor at the high school since I was well liked, known and trusted by many of the teachers. He was aware that I needed a project for my pastoral project. I had already approached him about doing a project with the Parent Teen program, but he felt the potential for conflict with a parent was too great because of the connection to religion and my ministry. That was a bit of a disappointment, but that is the world we live in today. Excited, I even asked several retired teachers if they would like to become involved in the project with me.

The project sounded interesting to me as a once-new-teacher. It would give me something to do to help others and I saw the opportunity to spread my ministry to young people who were soon going to need all the help they could get. No amount of schooling can ready a person for that crushing moment when the face of the responsibility looks back at them from twenty-plus seats. Furthermore, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §2255, it is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority to build up society in a spirit of truth, justice, and freedom.

My first need was to put together my focus group. I also became part of the group that made up the evaluations to be used district-wide at the end of the school year to

determine if the project was producing the desired results, since it was a two year project supported by a state grant. I also made up a needs assessment for my teachers with the assistance of one of my focus group members. I needed to know what the new teachers' questions would be, their concerns and their fears.

My main goal in my teaching ministry was to establish a strong, caring and trusting professional relationship with the new teachers. I had to demonstrate good listening skills and project confidence that I could maintain confidentiality with the new teachers assigned to me. What other staff members might be saying, ensuring honesty with my own appraisals, offering solid, useful teaching advice, all went together with being ready to give spiritual support when asked. I had to be the new teacher's advocate with both the administration and other staff members and give the teacher the support he or she needed.

I decided to meet with my new teachers twice a week initially instead of once a week because I had a feeling from what they were asking me during new teacher orientation week that they were a bit nervous about starting the new school year in their own classroom. I could adjust that rate as the year proceeded, from once a week to once a grading period, as needed.

I met with my focus group the first day of in-service week before school began to decide whether my goals were acceptable and to discuss how often our group would need to meet. Mr. Chase, the school principal, was very familiar with all the teachers. He was concerned about the teachers who had an alternative certification—their program required no student teaching whereas the teachers that went the traditional route had been in a classroom before and knew what to expect, at least in some measure. Mr. Chase and

the focus group felt that I needed to work with the alternative certification teachers more than the college trained teachers. My needs assessment information and my first face-to-face meeting with the new teachers indicated *high to very high* need for assistance on most of the questions among the alternative certified teachers, everything from where to get supplies to what to do if a student refused instruction and what to do if a fight broke out.

At the recommendation of my focus group, I also had a meeting with the first-year teachers at which I invited one of our experienced staff—in this case, my husband, who'd been teaching for about tens years then, and was the High School's go-to person for computer and software related issues. We covered using the online attendance reporting system, where to find instructions for the online gradebook and other similar issues. We tried to put to rest their concerns about discipline—our district is fortunate in that area—and give them some of the unwritten rules to teaching, the kind of thing the schools don't teach them. We introduced ourselves in some detail and made it clear that both of us were available anytime they needed us.

During our visits, I really wanted to make the teachers feel that I was there to help and instruct rather than assess their progress. I also wanted to be a new-teacher advocate as I operated between them and the principal. In fact, I had to be an advocate several times with most of my teachers. I most of all wanted to establish a trusting professional relationship with my teachers over the long term. I believe I succeeded because of the many positive remarks I read on the evaluations the teachers filled out at the end of each year.

It might seem that a project like this would be purely secular. That worried me a

bit—until the first time one of the new teachers stopped me at the end of an ordinary meeting and began asking me about God and Jesus and salvation and...before I knew it, my ministry had begun.

Project Evaluation

1

The focus committee consisted of five professional educators that I have known over the years. I wanted educators that were not afraid to give me their opinions, even if they were negative. I also wanted people who could be involved with the project for two years.

At the time, Mr. Chase was the high school principal, so I was there on his approval. I knew him from before I retired and we got along well. I was so glad that Mr. Chase was willing to be my project resource person because he was the most vocal during our focus group meetings as well as one-on-one. He gave me a lot of guidance during the two years we worked on the project together. I think he enjoyed being involved because it was different than his day-to-day work. He is a very insightful person and very spiritual in his thinking—which surprised me somewhat, since he is a public school principal.

In fact it was my good fortune that all of my focus group members demonstrated a spiritual wisdom in their thinking. Public school teachers must be pretty careful about revealing any of their own spiritual life because of the politically correct world in which we live. They were not all Catholic but I felt it was wonderful they were there for me.

Doris Zamzoe is another retired teacher who can't seem to stay retired. She was the most serious one on the committee. This was a side of her I had never seen. She has

some superlative leadership skills. It seemed that each person on my committee bloomed with a side of them new to me. Doris gave me such strength when I was going through my troubles in my personal life. She also served as a teacher mentor at the La Coste Elementary School. She enjoyed her job and was able to share her experience with me. She had good suggestions for the evaluation survey we intended to use district-wide. She helped me with the needs assessment but allowed me to have the most input as she believed I needed the experience in this area.

Debbie Haby is another retired teacher with many years experience at the elementary school. She is a strongly spiritual person and she became our spiritual leader. Debbie is also a very funny person. When things threatened to get stressful, she could be counted on to have us laughing. She is an insightful person when dealing with people, as was Mr. Chase.

Eva English, at the time of the project, was not a certified teacher. For longer than I can remember she had been working at the High School as an aide in various jobs as she slowly worked her way toward a teaching certificate. I have never known a more driven, determined person. Eva is an adult survivor of spina bifida, grievously handicapped. Shortly after the project ended, she became a teacher. Eva was the person who kept us grounded and on track. She was a big help in getting the project done. Her experience as an aide provided us with a different perspective to offer the new teacher.

David Bollinger, my husband, is a teacher of fifteen years experience. Before becoming a teacher, he was a programmer and a manager of programmers. He now teaches math and computer science as well as runs the tutoring lab. He was of great help with teaching the new teachers to use the software the district uses for attendance and

grade-keeping.

I cannot think of a way in which any of these friends and colleagues hindered the project. Quite frankly they were, each in their own way, indispensable. Without them, this project could not have been accomplished—certainly in no way as successfully as it was. Each supplied skills I did not have and helped me to learn or to begin to learn those skills.

2

The district set several goals for all mentors and the program. They wanted to provide welcome and support for the new professionals. The City Council of Castroville paid for a luncheon and a welcome bag for all the new teachers and the mentors. The district schedule for the year always includes a week prior to the normal inservice week expressly for the new teacher orientation. During that week, the district provided a tour of the Castroville area to help the new teachers get a feel for the area and, for some, help them find new homes.

One of our goals was to meet with the new teachers as often as needed to make certain each teacher had the emotional support they needed during the year. In particular, I wanted to make every effort to be in the vicinity when the new teachers first encountered the sobbing teenage girl who's missed a period, or any of the other world-ending crises our teens endure. That first crisis can be as traumatic for the new teacher as it is for the teenager. It's equally important that the new teacher be familiar with the state and federal laws regarding the protection of our children from child abuse. A teacher can lose their certification much too easily in that minefield of rules and the uncertainty of a teenager's tearful, and sometimes self-serving, tale.

Once the year began and the mentors got busy, the district backed out of the picture. They assumed that they'd delegated the job to their mentors and could leave it at that. I really felt that the district should improve on this. It seemed as if once the district had you, they lost interest. If the new teachers sensed this reality, it could become a problem. However, Mr. Chase was very good about visiting with the new teachers often during the year. He had the knack of making an unannounced visit without seeming threatening.

Medina Valley ISD was in "trouble" in regard to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and was thus pretty well motivated to get the best from their new hires. The NCLB required a school campus to show a specific annual percentage of improvement in several areas on pain of some pretty severe penalties. The district needed to encourage implementation of effective teaching strategies. They spent a goodly amount of money to supply each new teacher with a copy of *Tools for Teaching* by Fred Jones. They also held several inservices for the entire district.

I often met with my new teachers more than once a week, especially early in the year, to make sure I was available if needed. An unexpected circumstance was that the mentors often met among themselves to discuss their new teachers and the surrounding events. All the mentors were greatly concerned with how the district was coming across to the new teachers. Over the two year period, I began to see a breakdown in the community philosophy effort to help the teachers improve. It was as though the district had concluded that the project was either working well enough that they could move to other issues, or that the project was failing to produce results they could see and so they no longer were invested.

My own goals gave me great focus about what I planned to do when I saw what the district was doing. I had to be a facilitator of opportunity, supplying assistance to the new teachers as needed. I was always careful to maintain confidentiality between myself and the new teacher. I felt that they needed someone whom they could trust enough to confide in, and accept advice from. I felt I could accomplish part of this goal by meeting regularly with new teachers over a two year period to discuss needs and concerns. If I was always around, I'd become a fixture, disassociated from authority. Among the things the colleges do a poor job of doing is telling the new teacher about the Professional Development and Appraisal System. The PDAS is supposedly standard among schools, but there is some latitude and the universal unwritten rules and politics can be yet another minefield for the new teacher to navigate. I intended to make certain the new teachers understood the system and do what I could to lessen their anxiety about it.

Given the district's concern over their NCLB liabilities, it was important to help the new teacher incorporate instructional strategies and learning styles by reviewing the book provided by the district, "Tools for Teaching," mentioned above and sharing my own experience and the tips and tricks I've learned over the years. Developing a trusting relationship with the new teachers was very important during this phase of the project. I needed them to accept me as a reliable source of advice.

Furthermore, I had to develop a trusting relationship with other high school staff members, some of whom I knew from before I retired and others who were new to me. Toward that end, I organized a meeting with the new teachers and some of the other faculty members. This went very well as they exchanged very frank questions and answers. This contributed to the new teacher feeling they belonged to a trusting

community of fellow teachers.

I intended to serve as a liaison between the administration and the new teachers. Many new teachers are intimidated by the administration. All of us have been called to the principal's office in our youth and being called there even as an adult with professional credentials can be a fairly insecure moment. This is part of those unwritten rules mentioned above. The new teacher has never been told where the limits of their authority lie; even in school it simply isn't discussed. The new teacher has to find these things out experimentally. That is a part of the public school culture. There were a number of times when I arranged to get Mr. Chase and the new teachers together in the cafeteria for lunch in a more relaxed environment. Later, the administration would occasionally use me as an intermediary when they wanted to pass along information they were afraid would cause an uncomfortable situation. I feel very strongly about being an advocate for the new teacher when it came to communicating with Mr. Chase. I remember how alone a new teacher can feel the first time they are at odds with "the boss." There were many times I was able to prevent or intercept potentially negative events between the teacher and administration.

Another of my goals for the project was to develop good listening skills. I have learned through the years that I needed to do more listening and less talking. It may be a failing common to teachers—we expect to speak while others listen during class. I know that a person can sometimes learn interesting things simply by listening. To help prepare, I took the Interpersonal Communications Skills class with Anne Jenkins. I learned much about myself as a listener and a communicator.

I very much wanted to be a mentor of influence, to provide effective role

modeling and leadership. I was always happy to spend time in the teacher's class, even giving the lesson to serve as a role model. I encouraged creativity by allowing the new teachers to be flexible in their classroom. If they had issues with the administration, I went to their defense.

For this project to be a ministry, I felt that I had to be prepared, when the opportunity arose, to explain the Word of God. I had many chances to be a minister of God by being a person who facilitates rather than controls. I had to help develop a mutual respect for each others' competence and I eagerly accepted any request for a prayer.

I had one teacher, Jerry R. (not his real name) who was a pre-med student who thought he might give teaching a try. As it turns out, he was poorly suited to the career. We talked for hours. "I feel that my soul is lost and I don't know what God wants me to do," he confided. I gave him a book by Max Lucado. Before Jerry left, he thanked me for being there. "You helped me find my path," he said. When Jerry left at the end of the school year, I found a hole in my heart where he'd been. I knew he would have made one heck of a teacher if he had been able to adapt.

3

I've been a teacher for thirty years. This project was not going to have many mysteries for me. I taught regular education and special education. I was an educational diagnostician for three years. I taught and was supervisor of the Teen Parent program in this district. Before I retired, I was a homebound teacher for students who were unable to come to school for medical reasons and extended periods of time. While I was the homebound teacher, I did most of my ministry. Those children have been hurt, are hurting, and yet they are still having life demanded of them.

Of all my work in teaching, I found team teaching the most difficult. It depends upon who the other teacher is. I once worked with a very needy girl who was paralyzed. She was a very angry girl and expressed her anger by screaming obscenities at the top of her lungs. In a public school, we're not permitted to isolate the student but the screaming was disrupting the surrounding classes. My teammate abandoned me by unilaterally redefining our responsibilities, leaving me with the burden alone. I now have some trust issues with my fellow professionals. I know they are unlikely to repeat this other person's behavior, but I am hesitant to delegate and trust that the other person will perform. I need to work this out, but knowing that it is an issue is a good first step in overcoming the problem.

4

There was one skill I was not expecting and that was dealing with a difficult young teacher with many personal problems. I went into the project basically assuming that all the new teachers I would meet would be stable, dedicated people similar to myself at that age. My first encounter with a person who was poorly suited to the career was a shock, the Jerry R. mentioned previously. At first I was lost and didn't know if I could handle it. Mr. Chase was very helpful and I learned over the next two years how to handle these people and how to deliver dramatic news.

I spent hours with this teacher, trying to salvage him for the district. I eventually had to learn how to surrender to the inevitable and let go of a situation I wasn't being tasked with fixing. I could only hope that this young person would evolve and find a better place for his life. Much like the teenagers I've worked with over the years, if you don't learn that you can't fix all of them, the job will drive you mad.

This wasn't the last time I'll have to face this sort of problem. I must learn to handle them with grace and love.

5

This job had its challenges. Keeping up with the teacher and when they would be available for meetings was a bigger problem than I thought it would be. I found that maintaining a positive attitude could be a challenge as well. I had to learn to deal with frustrating situations as well.

For example, James K., one of my teachers, didn't show up for work and didn't call in, repeatedly. Mr. Chase asked me to speak with James about being on time and calling in if something comes up. Mr. Chase was asking me to do what amounted to an administrator's job. Teachers have more than a desk and a cubicle waiting for them at work and they must be conscientious about making certain their students are taken care of by qualified personnel. James K. would not become a part of the community teamwork effort to service his students.

6

No project this extensive could go without obstacles. My husband says if it goes perfectly, there's something wrong you didn't see. I had to handle several obstacles I didn't expect at the beginning, mostly related to the way the State of Texas certifies teachers. There is the usual college educated, college certified teacher who has gone through student teaching with a supervising teacher. In that traditional method, the new teachers are eventually completely on their own in a class that is entirely theirs. By the time they are certified, they have done the job, usually for at least half a school year.

Then there are a number of public sector businesses that will prepare a student for

teaching, using their own methods. I don't know much about how they do that training, but I do know that their students never do any student teaching in actual classrooms by the time they arrive at a public school. These teachers are called "alternative certifications." The idea was to bring teachers into the profession who had extensive experience in the subject area as professionals. Like many things, the original objective got lost in the clutter and a raft of new, untested teachers began to enter the system. Getting the alternative certification was cheaper and faster. In my opinion, however, quality overall suffered.

James K., mentioned above, was my first and biggest obstacle. He was a product of one of these companies, ABC-Inc. After my first formal observation, I felt there was something wrong. James was poorly organized and his lessons tended to wander from point to point. ABC-Inc called me and told me that James was not attending the nightly meetings with them, during which they evaluated his performance, suggested alternatives and, in essence, finished his training to be a teacher. They asked if I could please have a conference with him.

I have to admit that I delayed a few days while I tried to figure out how to tell him to attend his meetings without it seeming like a disciplinary action. I was his mentor, not his boss. When we had our conference, he had all manner of excuses for not attending the meetings. This is where I had to learn to be assertive without being harsh. Mr. Chase also spoke with him.

I had many conferences with James about areas that he needed to improve. Things seemed to get better and he was doing what was expected of him. The improvement lasted into the next semester, past the time when the district could have

replaced him with the minimum of fuss. I defended James and made the case for keeping him on.

Then the late arrivals at work resumed and he became erratic in making the ABC-Inc meetings again. Mr. Chase called me in and let me know that James was not doing well and the district was considering non-renewing him at the end of the year. Getting fired, being forced to resign, etc, are all things a teacher can overcome in their career. A non-renewal is the kiss of death. Students and parents were complaining about James and his teaching. I told Mr. Chase that he seemed to be doing OK during my observations. Clearly, his behavior changed when he knew he was being watched. I arranged to observe his class without his knowledge. The results were very disturbing—they confirmed Mr. Chase's information.

I scheduled a conference with James to get to the bottom of the problem. Without getting into the details, I'll simply say the conference was a difficult one. James' wife even came for the meeting. With great difficulty, I coaxed an admission from him that he was an adult ADHD who was concealing his handicap. Despite our efforts, the district decided that James would be non-renewed at the end of the school year.

That meeting with James and Mr. Chase was among the most difficult things I have done. James fell apart emotionally. Mr. Chase helped me learn how to cope with this situation. It was difficult, but I got through it.

7

I was particularly pleased with one strategy that I tried. I arranged to have the department chairs make buddies with the new teachers, especially the ones who were coming along fine. That way, the new teachers would have someone available if they

needed something when I wasn't there. I was truly blessed as I managed to choose the right buddy for the right new teacher. The buddy system worked very well. In fact, the high school used to do this with all their new teachers years ago when my husband first started teaching. I'm not sure why the district stopped doing this.

The teaching staff on any campus forms a community with its own personality. That includes a sense of unity, morale, and that undefined esprit de corps that the military talks about. A campus with high morale that is working as a team will be an effective campus. The keystone of that community is the principal. Unfortunately, Medina Valley has had a stream of different principals, each with very different personalities. Each time the Principal is changed, old policies and programs are suspended. The new Principal installs the policies and programs he or she believes will be effective. The final judgment on those new policies may take a year or two years to determine and in the meantime, low morale and ineffective leadership should be expected.

In my opinion, our current principal did the right thing when he took over. For the most part, with very few exceptions, he left everything from the previous administration in place for most of his first school year with us. That gave him time to evaluate those policies and make more informed decisions about what, and who, needed to be changed. Mr. Tyler has restored the sense of community at the High School campus and brought them from serious trouble with the state and federal government to a "Recognized School."

Slowing down and widening my focus to those around me is a difficult thing for me. I'm accustomed to barging forward against resistance and making my own way. It's

important to slow down and listen to what one is saying and thinking about how others might be hearing your words. An innocent comment might be completely misread by your listeners and one needs to be alert to the possibility. Slowing down also gives one time to reflect on what others are saying and improves ones listening skills.

Mr. Chase had a very laid-back response to most things. That troubled people at first, but I came to realize that it was his way of slowing down to make sure he understood what was taking place and giving himself an opportunity to make the best decision possible.

Trust is another difficult thing for me. I find it hard to let go and trust others to do their jobs. I can't do everything and so the people assisting me have to be trusted to perform.

I also need to trust God more to take care of my needs and others. It was something I worked really hard at when I took the Prayer and Spirituality class. Like my little sister says, "Let go and let God." God blessed me with my choices of buddies for my new teachers. I could trust them to do the job. That was an important lesson for me.

A portion of that trust is to trust myself to grow spiritually. I have to allow myself to keep my focus on the right direction and let the Holy Spirit guide my hand and my intuition. To trust God is to trust myself.

Mr Chase was my resource person and I was blessed to have his help. He was a retired principal who'd come out of retirement to help the Superintendent, a friend, get the High School back on track. Mr. Chase came with a wealth of experience to offer me in my first year as a mentor while I struggled to develop leadership skills with adults and

other professionals. A teacher learns to lead children. A somewhat different perspective is needed with leading teachers.

Mr. Chase and I had many conferences about the new teachers I worked with. His insight and experience helped me to become a leader among the other mentors and to apply my influence to the program. His guidance through the episode with James K. was essential, in the end, to my development.

If there was a downside to my relationship with Mr. Chase, it was that he could be indecisive at the oddest times. Many of the decisions he made were made by the precession of events rather than his determination of a planned course. This could be frustrating at times and I can't say with any certainty that his methods were always the best course. Still and all, I took that to be a demonstration that there are some problems that can't be solved "now;" that time and patience will often reveal a solution that all the worry and lost sleep in the world can't.

10

When I began my job as a mentor, I had no idea how it would influence my spiritual life. I knew this job would open my ability to be more reflective into my own life as I tried to reflect on other people's lives and motivations. It made me more of an active learner, left me open to new ideas and gave me the courage to put those ideas forward.

I discovered that a mentorship, done honestly, is indistinguishable from ministry. I already knew that a school campus is a small community, as tightly knit as any neighborhood. I had worked on one campus or another for the better part of thirty years. If the campus community was a happy one, odds were the campus would be effective

overall. My mentoring of the new teachers could well be described as a new ministry to the community of teachers, for surely any action I took for my teachers would spread to the remainder of the community, like ripples in a pond.

There is a parallel with Jesus, the Disciples and the early Christian community. His relationship to his Disciples can be described as a mentorship. His work for and with the people around him can be described as a ministry. Christianity spread throughout the community like ripples in a pond.

I enjoyed so sharing my spiritual growth with others and while I sometimes got the odd look from one or another colleague, I would often get an excited glow from others. Mentorship made me realize that one could become stuck in their spiritual growth, or worse, intimidated into hiding one's spirituality because it isn't "PC." From encounter to encounter, I found my faith either challenged as the dreaded "inappropriate," or affirmed by fellow spiritual travelers.

Often, one of my teachers would ask me a spiritual question during one of our meetings. I made no secret of my religious orientation so their questions weren't surprising. Still, once asked, I felt the need to share and found my faith affirmed. Sometimes I would surprise myself with how much I knew and comprehended spiritually. My husband often says that we don't know what we know until we are asked to produce that knowledge.

I believed that part of my ministry was to encourage the new teacher to improve their student's desire to learn by giving the teacher confidence in what they knew and what they had learned about teaching. Confidence must be high to have the faith to stand before thirty children and make them have faith that the material being presented is true.

If the student senses hesitancy or insecurity, the teacher's effectiveness is greatly reduced.

It can be tricky to deal with spiritual issues in the public schools, but a person's faith doesn't have to be spoken to be articulated.

Being a mentor taught me so many things. I felt very strongly about being responsible, reasonable and reliable with my new teachers growth as a teacher and as a person. I was not only an advocate for the teacher; I was also an advocate for their spiritual growth, and for mine as well. It made me aware that trust is fundamental in any relationship, yet I found myself not being very trusting of others. I never considered helping others grow and become better people to be a ministry. This job opened my heart to trusting others by having faith in others. This is where ministry came into my life and affirmed my faith in the power of the community.

I also learned that I am far from knowing everything about God and how urgently I want to learn more. I need to listen better, to sense their need and thus be able to begin to fill that need. If the ministry did anything, it affirmed my faith in others and in God.

When the future arrives, I hope to go into some sort of ministry for the aged or sick. But I can only guess where God might lead me.

Medina Valley High School

8395 FM 471 South, Castroville, Texas 78009-5309

PH 830 - 931 - 2514 FAX 830 - 931 - 3258



Student Hours: 7:55 am – 3:00 pm Office Hours: 7:15 am – 4:15 pm



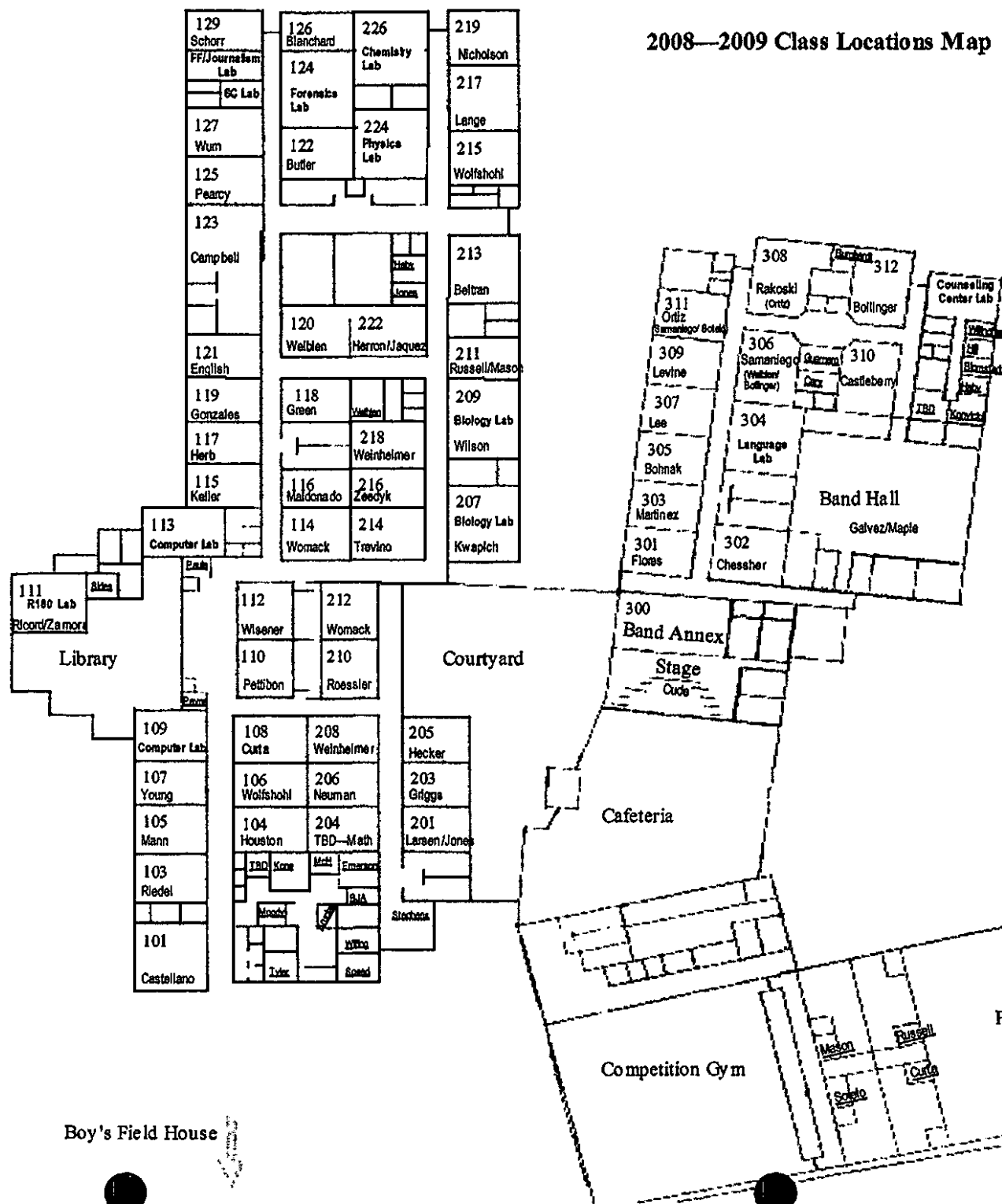
James Chase
Principal

8365 FM 471 South

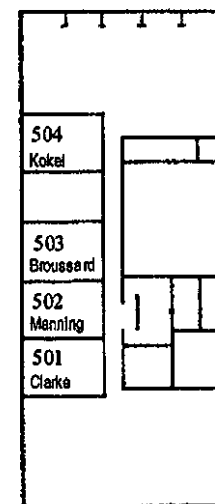
Castroville, TX 78009

830-931-2243

Fax 830-931-0371



Vocational Building



Boy's Field House

Girl's Field House
ROTC Command

Needs Assessment Questionnaire for Beginning Teachers

Part A. Please choose the response for each item that most nearly indicates your level of need for assistance in the area described in the item.

Possible Responses:

- A. Little or no need for assistance in this area
- B. Some need for assistance in this area
- C. Moderate need for assistance in this area
- D. High need for assistance in this area
- E. Very high need for assistance in this area

1. _____ Finding out what is expected of me as a teacher
2. _____ Understanding the curriculum
3. _____ Obtaining instructional resources and materials
4. _____ Communicating with the principal
5. _____ Communicating with other teachers
6. _____ Communicating with families
7. _____ Organizing physical space
8. _____ Planning for instruction
9. _____ Managing my time and work
10. _____ Dealing with stress
11. _____ Managing classroom procedures
12. _____ Managing student behavior
13. _____ Diagnosing student needs
14. _____ Assessing student learning
15. _____ Motivating students
16. _____ Assisting students with special needs
17. _____ Dealing with individual differences among students
18. _____ Using a variety of teaching methods
19. _____ Grouping for effective instruction
20. _____ Facilitating group discussions and using effective questioning techniques
21. _____ Completing administrative paperwork
22. _____ Administering standardized achievement tests
23. _____ Understanding the school system's teacher evaluation process
24. _____ Understanding my legal rights and responsibilities as a teacher
25. _____ Becoming aware of special services provided by the school district

Part B. Please respond to the following items:

26. List any professional needs you have that are not addressed by the preceding items:

27. What types of support that are not currently available should the school district provide to you and other beginning teachers?

MEDINA VALLEY ISD MENTOR PROGRAM SURVEY

Teacher Campus Level: ☐ Castroville Elementary ☐ La Coste Elementary
☐ Potranco Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High School

Please Rate the following statements based upon your experience with the MVISD Mentor Program.

My Mentor has helped me in:

1. Dealing Effectively with Student discipline problems

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

2. Finding out what is expected by the school district, principal, other teachers and parents

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

3. Obtaining instructional resources and materials

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

4. Planning, organizing, and managing time and work

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

5. Assessing students and evaluating students' work

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

6. Identifying Methods to motivate students

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

7. Dealing with individual student's needs, interests, abilities, and problems

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

8. Learning and using effective teaching methods

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

9. Learning to deal more effectively with parents

A	B	C
Not Needed	No, But Needed	Yes

Part II:

10. Briefly describe the aspects of the mentor program that were most and beneficial.

11. Briefly describe something you think could be improved upon.

12. At this point in time, what is your greatest concern for new teachers in MV?

13. What, if anything, would you change about the MVISD entry-year program?

14. Do you have any other comments regarding your experience with the Medina Valley Mentor program in general?

Time Log for Mentoring

Mentee's Name: _____

Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:

(duplicate as needed)

Mentor Subject: _____

Date: _____

Class Period observed/taught: _____

Topics to discuss:

Next time:

M EDINA V ALLEY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



"Proud of our past, dedicated to the present, committed to the Future"

July 11, 2006

Susan Bollinger
7410 Silent Sunset
San Antonio, TX 78250

Dear Susie:

Thank you for serving as a mentor teacher for the 2005-2006 school year. It is important to provide new teachers with the support they need throughout their first year in our district. Because of the positive feedback we've received, we will continue this model next year. We will be requesting applications for mentors for the 2006-2007 school year as soon as we have more information regarding the number of teachers new to the district.

Once again, thank you for being a very important part of this program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annette Gonzales". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Annette Gonzales
Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum/Instruction and Assessment

To: Annette Gonzales

From: Susan Bollinger

Date: 5/15/08

Subject: Letter of Intent for next school year.

I am keenly interested in applying for the 2008-2009 school year as a teacher mentor. Please accept this letter as my letter of intent for next year.

I am looking forward in doing this next year since I will be using it as my pastoral project. If all goes as planned, I will be finished with this Masters next spring. I learned more about working with others and will put this new information to good use.

I pray your summer will not be too stressful and you will get to spend some time with your growing family.

Please take care and I will be seeing you next year.

Regards, Susie

To: Mrs. Nita Calle
CC: Rae Queen, Randy Young, James Chase
From: Susan Bollinger-District Teacher Mentor
Date: 5/22/06
Re: James Nowlin visitation log

I visited James once a week during the Spring semester. I wanted to back off from twice a week to once a week because he was becoming dependent on me. I saw very little improvement during the Spring semester. I had hoped he would improve in the areas of being able to handle more than one situation during his teaching time with the students. He really had problems focusing on what he needed to do during his time with the students. For example, if there was a fire drill or a drug dog run in the class room, he had problems getting the students back on task. Getting the students or keeping the students on task seemed to be one of his problems. However, there were times he had the students on task and he knew what he was doing. Mr. Nowlin was very passionate about his theater classes but there were times he could not keep them under control.

I would review his evaluations that you had done with him and I would always tell him what he needed to work on. I would see improvement for a short while and then he went back to being not on task and not focused with the students. During the middle of the Spring semester, he started making excuses and blaming everyone else for his problems instead of working harder on what he needed to do. I did everything I could to be positive and help him to have a positive attitude and try to get him to do better. It was hard to get him to realize that he was making mistakes and he needed to do better, for example not asking for permission to using the cafeteria to do a play, not showing up to work a couple of times, and not following UIL rules.

I would meet with Mr. James Chase often to keep him up to date with my visits. Sometime in April, Mr. Chase said they were not going to offer him another contract and for me not to visit him so often. Mr. Nowlin took the non-renewal hard and I continued to see him to keep his spirit up until school was out.

I have enjoyed my first year doing this job and I have learned some new ways to work with people that are not doing well. I have enjoyed working with Act-SA and hope to in the future.

To: N.Calle
From: Susan Bollinger-MV Teacher Mentor
Date: May 22, 2006
Re: Jerry Gonzales-Spring Semester Log

I saw Jerry at least once a week just to see how he was doing and if he needed any help or if he needed to talk about any problems he was having. Early in the Spring semester, he was having problems with keeping the students interested in the subject matter. I told him he was teaching a very difficult subject for most of these students and a lot of them really didn't want to be taking Chemistry.

I observed him twice during the Spring semester and he was really taking a good whack at keeping these kids on task and interested. I could tell that he was suffering from "why am I here?" about the middle of the semester. That's when he told me he was thinking of giving up teaching and wondering if this was the field in which he wanted to spend the rest of his working career. We talked a long time and I fully understand how he felt because my nephew went through the same experience when he was doing his student teaching.

My conversations with Mr. Chase about Jerry were always positive and I always got the feeling that the district was pleased with Jerry's progress. There were a couple of times Jerry had some discipline problems with his students and Jerry always corrected whatever problems he was having. He always came across very professional with me which I appreciated. I would hire Jerry in a flash if I were in a hiring position.

Spring Semester Log:

Jan.:	March:	May:
1-6	3-3	5-3
1-13	3-10	5-11
1-24	3-20	5-25
Feb.:	April:	
2-10	4-5	
2-17	4-13	
	4-18	

Handouts the district had given to the new teachers.

CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO KNOW OR DO AT YOUR SCHOOL SITE BEFORE SCHOOL OPENS

Needed supplies, Materials, and Equipment:

- ☐ 1. Do you have all necessary furniture and equipment (including A-V equipment) for your classroom? (If not, have you found out what the procedures are getting them?)
- ☐ 2. Are student textbooks available for your students? (If not, do you know where to get them and what procedures to follow in assigning them to students?)
- ☐ 3. Do you have necessary expendable supplies, including bulletin board materials? (If not, do you know how to get them?)

Location of Areas in the School"

- ☐ 1. Do you know where special areas of the school are located (the cafeteria, media center, lounge, office, music room, counselor's office, art room, supply room, and other areas you may need to visit or send students)?
- ☐ 2. Do you have schedule of assigned times for classes (bells for opening/closing of school, lunch, music, art, physical education, playground use, bus and automobile boarding, etc.)?
- ☐ 3. If you take students to the playground, do you know where the playground is that your students will use?

School Rules/ Procedures/Calendar:

- ☐ 1. Do you have a copy of school rules and policies? (If not, where do you get them, and what is expected of you in regard to teaching them to students?)

- ☐ 2. Do you know procedures as to arrival and dismissal of students each day, keeping of attendance, lunch records, recording of "tardy" students, discipline rules and consequences, in-school or out-of school suspension, contacting parents in case of misbehavior, and keeping students after school?
- ☐ 3. Do you have a school system calendar and information on special events in your school for the first few days?
- ☐ 4. Do you have or know procedures for students to use during visits to media center and check-out of books?

Information Related to Records and Students with Special Needs:

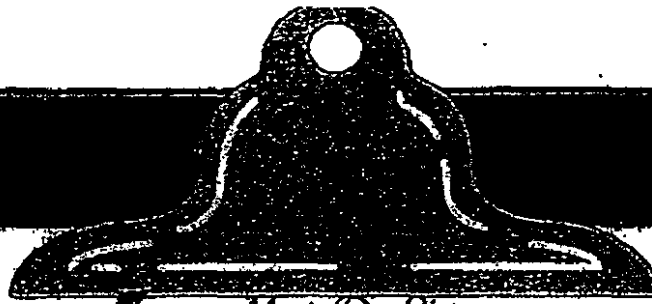
- ☐ 1. Do you know where student's cumulative and Intervention folders are kept and what procedures are necessary in order for you to have access to them?
- ☐ 2. do you have your class roster? If so, have you checked each student's cumulative record to determine whether any students have a handicapping condition or special provisions of an Individualized Education Plan that must be followed?
- ☐ 3. Do you know what resources the school system has for diagnosis and assistance of students with learning or behavioral problems?
- ☐ 4. If you have students with handicapping conditions who have been placed in resource classes, where do they go, and what time will they leave the classroom?
- ☐ 5. Are you aware of the record-keeping procedures that are required in the school?
- ☐ 6. Do you know what to do in case of severe behavior problems or illness of a child?

People in the School:

- ☐ 1. Do you know what days the school nurse will be available and what kinds of situations should be referred to her/him?
- ☐ 2. Do you know who will be your assigned mentor, and have you met that person?
- ☐ 3. Have you met the school counselor and learned what things he/she can assist you with?
- ☐ 4. If there is an assistant principal, do you know which things the principal handles and which ones are handled by the assistant?

PREPARATION OF CLASSROOM:

- ☐ 1. Have you set up a convenient room arrangement?
 - *Does it permit you to monitor students easily?
 - *Is there adequate space between desks for YOU to move when monitoring students?
 - *Can students see you during presentations?
 - *Is AV equipment where it will be used?
 - *Have you provided storage space for student belongings (such as lunch boxes, books bags, and coats)?
 - *If you are using centers, are they located where you can monitor them easily, and do they have adequate materials?
- ☐ 2. Have you arranged materials and supplies so that frequently used ones are easily accessible?
- ☐ 3. Have you done a name tag for each student's desk?
- ☐ 4. Have you done bulletin boards?



Must-Do List Before the First Day....

___ Make bulletin board decisions: where to post announcements, menu, and calendar; what kind of welcome-back display to make; which boards will be for subject area stress; where to display children's work; which boards you will let students design.

___ Set up learning centers.

___ In the classroom, place signs and labels wherever necessary.

___ Make class list to post on door.

___ Put your name on the outside door

___ Write your name and other important information on the board.

___ Make student name tags for desks or have them make their own.

___ Find out schedules for lunch, gym, art, music, library.

___ Post schedules (library, lunch, PE, art, music, buses).

___ Obtain supplies

___ NC Standard Course of Study

___ Plan book

___ Attendance materials

___ Paper clips

___ Duplicating paper

___ Construction paper

___ Manilla folders

___ Different kinds of tape

___ Extra writing paper

___ Grade book

___ Rubber bands

___ Stapler and staples

___ Handwriting paper

___ Receipt book

___ Straight pins

___ Spare pencils/pens

___ Tissues

___ Prepare packets for students to take home the first day. Include:

___ Emergency forms

___ School rules/handbook

___ Necessary Supplies

___ Bus or transportation rules/information

___ Note to parents/request room parents

___ Welcome-to-my-class note

___ Volunteer Request

___ Insurance Forms

___ Lunch Information

___ Photo/Video Parent Release Form

Must-Do List continued

___ Tentatively group students by reading levels using reading or permanent records.

___ Check to see which students may be going to special classes (locate Exceptional Children's (EC) file).

___ Make notes concerning students who will receive special services.

___ Prepare class rolls and permanent records.

___ Set up class library.

___ Make a seating chart.

___ Read all faculty memos.

___ Post emergency procedure lists, maps, etc., near classroom door.

___ Have fire emergency exits posted.

___ Pick up parent correspondence distributed through the school office.

___ Complete lesson plans for the first week of school.

___ Put final touches on the classroom décor.

___ Get textbooks from the book room. Do paperwork needed to issue them.

___ Secure materials that accompany texts.

___ Gather appropriate supplementary materials.

___ Check out library books.

___ Set up a folder for a substitute to use in case of emergency. Include

___ Daily schedule (fill in as soon as possible)

___ Seating chart (fill in as soon as possible)

___ Reproducible activities (change monthly)

___ Prepare a file for correspondence from parents.

___ Prepare a file for faculty bulletins.

___ Write tentative lesson plans for the coming week.

___ Duplicate materials needed the first few days.

___ Make a checklist for returned forms (can be used later for report cards and other items).

___ In a basket, tuck away a few treats for yourself. Dried fruits, mints, hot chocolate mix, or apple cider mix may be just the pick-me-up you'll need some fall afternoon.

Additional Notes:

Maximizing Your Classroom Time

- Before you leave school each day, prepare your room and materials for the following day. When you walk into your classroom ready to begin the day, you avoid the stress of last minute preparation. This is also valuable if you have to be absent unexpectedly.
- Have a “warm-up” activity for students to do as soon as they enter the class each day. Select a meaningful activity students can do on their own. This will assure maximum time on task for them and allow the teacher to tend to matters such as checking roll.
- Insist that students are ready to work when the bell rings, and begin class immediately.
- To save instructional time, return papers while students are entering the room or during a start-up activity. Or, have student assistants distribute corrected papers to students.
- Before students arrive, post the objective, topics for discussion, and homework assignments on the board each day.
- Use “practice-without-paper” techniques to check student work or understanding, such as whiteboards, hand signals, computers, calculators, and games.
- Use a timer or stopwatch to assist with transitions from one lesson to another.
- With multiple classes entering the classroom during the day, a tray/basket labeled with the class name, subject area, or time can be used for leaving assignments or tests. The same label format can be used for storing corrected student work that needs to be returned to students.
- In the beginning of the school year, seat students alphabetically or use nametags so the teacher can quickly learn the names of several different classes of students.
- When utilizing group work formats, first teach all the various roles to be used within the groups (recorder, speaker, timekeeper, resource manager, etc.). Post the responsibilities of that role.
- Always give all instructions for group work (including information about times) before asking/allowing students to move around the classroom.
- When having the class work with materials that need to be distributed in the classroom (paint, books, paper, markers, etc.), assign a few students to handle the distribution of all materials. This will insure minimal movement in the room and help keep order.
- Develop strategies for the collection of student work. For example, have students place completed homework folder/assignment in a tray upon entering the room and check their names from a list.
- Assign a student to compile a work packet for an absent student. This can involve having the student collect work sheets and assignments and place them in a folder. The student can also list homework or reading assignments for the absent student.

TIPS FROM VETERAN TEACHERS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR PLANNING TIME

- Keep a folder on your desk marked "office." Place in the folder any items that need to be taken to the office, copy room, mail boxes, etc. Make limited trips.
- Take a pen with you each time you visit the office or mailbox. Fill out any forms, sign documents, or provide responses to items in your mailbox while you are in the office.
- Make it a practice to handle each piece of paper only once. This will keep a pile of memos or incomplete work from accumulating on your desk.
- Designate a portion of a desk drawer or a box on your desk for items that need to be handled immediately. Make an effort to keep that container empty.
- Do not allow others to infringe on your planning time. If necessary, put a sign on the door to indicate your need not to be disturbed during planning time.
- Recruit parent volunteers to help with tasks such as preparing materials for classroom: Manipulatives, bulletin boards, setting up lab or art activities, etc.
- Ask a teammate to proofread all parent communications.
- Select a trustworthy student for quick, immediate runs to the office.
- Try to plan with a group or at least another teacher with the same teaching assignment.
- Do not "visit" in the teacher's lounge during planning time.
- Keep a list of things you need to complete during your planning period on your desk, and check them off as you complete them. Be reasonable in your expectations of what you can accomplish during a planning period.
- Determine a triage system for handling issues that arise during the day so that your planning time will be proactive not reactive.
- During extremely busy times during the year, it may be necessary to handle chores after school that you have not been able to address during your planning time. "Carrying over" to the next day those untended items on your list of priorities will only result in an avalanche of backlogged paperwork by the end of the week.
- In your first years of teaching, do not over commit yourself to activities that leave you with little personal planning time.

Classroom Management Tips:

1. Decorate your classroom! You will be spending many hours in this room so make it yours. Give it a "homey" feel (i.e. Desk lamp, rug, pillow, family photographs, etc.) Don't leave the walls bare! Kids like to have something to look at. Create bulleting boards to display student work. If there is something you really want kids to know, write it on a big poster. Hang up "sayings" or affirmations. You don't want it to be too fussy, this can be distracting, but you don't want it to be sterile either. Create a learning environment. You can even make the room a learning activity (ie. Ask students to choose one thing in the room that appeals to them. Have them write or tell why. Or remove something from the room one day and see if they can tell you what is missing.).
2. **Rules and Procedures:** Whether you make the rules or have your class make them together, don't have more than five rules. Make sure they are stated in a clear and concise manner. For example, rules such as act appropriately, be responsible, and treat others with respect are too vague. Rules such as keep hands, feet and objects to yourself; be in class on time; and follow directions the first time they are given are more specific. Post the rules where they will be visible. Rules should have consequences and these should be posted as well. Rules are different from procedures. Procedures are methods or processes for how things are to be done in a classroom. Procedures should be explained, rehearsed, and reinforced. See the list of areas you might want to consider having procedures for.
3. Set up your discipline log and parent contact log right away and USE them! I can't say it enough **DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT!** - Your lesson plan book is a good place to document things because you will probably always have it with you!
4. Call parents right away. Don't wait for another incident. Call parents for good behaviors, too. It is a good idea to make a parent contact during the first week of school to introduce yourself and let them know how much you are enjoying working with their child. If you send an important note home, follow it up with a phone call.
5. There are some very special people that work in your school that you should get to know. Knowing these people will help make your job much easier! They are listed in no particular order.
 - ❖ School Secretary - can help you with all the paper materials that cross your path (and it can be overwhelming)
 - ❖ Janitor - can help you get your room as you would like it
 - ❖ Librarian - can help you with research projects and can keep a look out for new materials for future projects. (Our librarian also keeps a look out for

good educational web sites that are published in magazines- an invaluable resource)

- ❖ Veteran teacher - Every new teacher needs to be able to feel comfortable talking to someone who has been in the business a while to talk to about the trails and tribulations of education. Hopefully you find someone who is reassuring your reasons for becoming a teacher.
- ❖ New teacher-new teachers also need to be able to talk to others who have gone through, recently, or who are still going through the first difficult years of teaching. This is where you get the most sympathy and honest understanding. This is someone also who will help with the small details that teachers who have been teaching for years take for granted.
- ❖ Audio visual person - When we need a VCR, overhead, or a light bulb we need it now. Being on the good side of your AV guy is important for the rookie teacher, because planning alternate LP's isn't as easy for us as it is for the Veteran!
- ❖ Principal- Getting along with the administration as a non-tenured teacher should go without saying. Be honest and go to your principal with concerns and updates of how you are doing in class.
- ❖ Counselor - When having a serious problem with a student it helps to be in contact with the guidance office. Caring about students is why most of us go into education. However, as a rookie teacher you must also know your limits. You can't save everyone and schools do have resources. Learn to use them!
- ❖ Coaches - When students know that you are in contact with their coaches, matters can seem very different. Most coaches are very willing to use their pull with students to help you get performance out of their athletes. The more coaches you know the better off you will be. (It also helps if you can show up to their games, matches and meets!)
- ❖ Computer Technician - more and more computers are becoming a part of education. Getting along with the computer person helps when you break out in a panic because of problems. This contact can also help you with integrating technology into your curriculum.

6. Preparation is the key to success. Here are a few things to think about when preparing your classroom:

- **Student Desks:** Desks do not have to be in traditional rows, but all chairs should face forward so that all eyes are focused on you. (you can put students in groupings after you have established classroom management)
 - **Floor Space:** Keep high traffic areas clear. Don't put desks, chairs, or tables in front of doors, water fountains, sinks, pencil sharpeners, or your desk.
 - **Wall Space:** Elementary teachers usually love this part, most secondary dread it. (It doesn't have to be that bad!)
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- ❖ Cover one or more bulletin boards with colored paper and trim and leave it blank. This board will be to display student work. Do not decorate it at all. This is not your showcase, but theirs.
 - ❖ Display your discipline plan in a prominent place the first week. You can move it after the first few weeks.
 - ❖ Have a consistent place for listing the day's or week's assignments.
 - ❖ Post a large example of the proper heading or style for papers to be done in class.
 - ❖ Display the feature topic, theme, chapter or skill for the day or the current unit.
 - **Teacher Area:** the closer you are to your students the more you will minimize your classroom behavior problems.
 - ❖ Place teacher's desk, file and other equipment so that they do not interfere with the flow of traffic.
 - ❖ Do not create a barrier between yourself and your students. Put your desk in a place that you will be able to assist, reinforce or discipline.
 - ❖ Place your desk away from the door so that no one can take things for your desk and quickly walk out.
 - ❖ If you choose to have everything on and in your desk treated as personal property, make this clear during your teaching of classroom procedures and routines.
 - **Teaching Materials:** Having these ready to go will help reduce stress the first week of school.
 - ❖ Have a letter listing what materials students need to bring from home.

- ❖ Have a method of matching students to a desk. (name cards or overhead transparency)
 - ❖ Have basic school materials like paper, pencils, construction paper equipment, software etc.
 - ❖ Find and organize containers for your materials. Use copy paper boxes, coffee cans, milk cartons, and shoe boxes to store materials. Label containers and place an inventory card listing everything that should be in the container.
 - ❖ Organize and file your materials. Do likewise with extra worksheets so that they are immediately ready for any students who are absent or who need extra help.
 - ❖ Have a place to keep your valuables, purse, keys and briefcase.
 - ❖ Have an emergency kit put together containing items like: tissue, rags, paper towels, soap, first aid kit, extra lunch money, band aides.....etc.
 - ❖ Obtain teacher manuals and any resource materials that you will be using.
 - ❖ Get a supply of forms that are used for daily running of the school routines. Examples: Attendance forms, tardy slips, hall passes, and referral forms. Put them in a place you will be able to get to them easily.
7. Although the first years of teaching seem to consume you, you do need to stop to reflect on how you are doing.
- ❖ Make short notes about how policies work, how units went, and think about how you treat your students. After all, we are there for the students, and there is more than content to teaching. However, this is difficult to see the first years.
 - ❖ Take compliments seriously and criticism lightly, Mistakes are how we learn. Take the compliments you get and put them in a "warm fuzzy" file to pullout on a rainy day.
 - ❖ Share, share and share/ you must have someone to confide in. A spouse or significant other is fine, but it really ought to be someone in the teaching field—a mentor teacher, or even a new or student teacher. Many times just talking about frustrations and joys gives you insight about the situation that you hadn't seen before.

- ❖ **Share materials.** Most teachers take it as a compliment that you want to copy their units. It is much easier having something to work from, something to build on, upon which you can make changes that will fit your teaching style.
- ❖ **Write out your philosophy and have it handy.** On days you wonder why you went into the profession of education, pull it out and remember your reasons for becoming a teacher.
- ❖ **Have ways of encouraging yourself.** Maybe it is a favorite poem, story or audio/video tape.
- ❖ **Take time for non-education reflection.** You need to remain sane for your sake and for your student's sake. Enjoy music, quiet time and/or moments just to be thankful for what you have.
- ❖ **Finally take care of yourself.** Teaching is hard work and it is easy to over-extend yourself during those first years. You don't have to do everything-learn to say no! You know what you can realistically handle. Ask for help when you need it. Eat right and stay away from too much junk and caffeine. Practice stress management techniques.