

Decision Maker Guide



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**Steps to Success: An Instructional
Design for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaches
in Head Start and Early Head Start**



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children & Families
Administration on Children, Youth & Families
Head Start Bureau



Steps to Success

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Preface

The *Steps to Success* Decision Makers Guide has been written for you—Head Start leaders, managers, and Policy Councils. You strive to build systems that provide staff with the resources and support they need to succeed in their work. You seek effective ways to develop the skills and knowledge of new and experienced staff. Most of all, you look for strategies that reflect the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and can help staff provide rich early learning experiences for children. Building a mentor-coaching system can help you achieve all of these goals, and more.

The Head Start Bureau envisions a model of staff support that includes both mentoring and coaching strategies. In this model, Mentor-Coaches guide protégés to reflect on and analyze their work with children and families. They also help protégés to connect new research and current theory to their practice. With protégés, Mentor-Coaches actively explore new approaches for supporting children's growth in key early learning domains. They coach protégés as they try new or complex strategies. Above all, Mentor-Coaches help protégés stay focused on how their practice impacts child outcomes.

Warm, highly-skilled Mentor-Coaches play a huge role in an effective system. As is true with all learning, strong relationships make mentoring possible. Staff form close bonds with experts or skilled peers who guide them in finding new ways to support children's learning. But, Mentor-Coaches do not bear the sole responsibility. As decision makers, you can "make or break" effective mentoring with the systems that you create.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to mentor-coaching. There are, however, some important steps you can take to assure that your program provides effective mentor-coaching. In this guide, you will find a wealth of hands-on tips and tools that will help you build strong systems to support your Mentor-Coaches and help this powerful strategy work for you.

About *Steps to Success*

This Decision Maker Guide is part of *Steps to Success: An Instructional Design for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaches in Head Start and Early Head Start*. *Steps to Success* is designed to support the ongoing mentor-coaching initiative in programs. *Steps to Success* includes the development of training materials and other resources that draw upon current research and effective practices related to staff development and early literacy. The project is supported through STEP-Net (<http://www.step-net.org>), the communication network available to the Mentor-Coach community.

Steps to Success includes a multi-unit training package for Mentor-Coaches; this Decision Maker Guide; the STEP-Line (1-877-COACH 04, or 1-877-262-2404) a support telephone line for mentor-coaching; and a newsletter, *STEP-Notes*, which features information about effective approaches to mentor-coaching and experiences from the field.

Introduction

Why Develop A Mentor-Coaching System?

Across the country, Head Start programs are using mentor-coaching to support staff. The Bureau is invested in this strategy as a way to improve child outcomes. Research supports this belief. Studies show that mentoring builds on protégés' actual practice and provides richer learning than one-time workshops. It can also complement staff member's higher education studies.

Research also pinpoints content-focused coaching as an effective way to foster staff's growth. With Mentor-Coaches' support, staff apply knowledge as they acquire it. They identify goals to enrich children's learning. They explore new content, reflect, and problem-solve. They have chances to learn, grow, and share what they know in a supportive environment. All of these are essential parts of effective lifelong learning.

Mentor-coaching has great potential to strengthen Head Start. Staff become involved in their own growth. They also become change agents. With their mentors, they partner in improving

child outcomes. Together, they assess and enhance children's learning. *Steps to Success* mentor-coaching focuses on early language and literacy. But, your program can use the strategy to build staff capacity in any early learning domain.

A Guide to the Guide

In the pages that follow, we provide you with information to guide you in creating strong, effective early literacy mentor-coaching systems. Even if you already have a system in place, we hope that the information in the following five sections will help you continue to strengthen your system.

- 1. Selecting a Model for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching.** Here you will find a detailed description of the different approaches to mentor-coaching. This information will help you design and/or modify your model and its oversight systems.
- 2. Finding Financial Resources for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching.** In this section, you will learn about different sources of support for your system. You will gain a good overview of sources, as well as tips on how to access them.
- 3. Selecting and Matching Mentor-Coaches.** This section will engage you in thinking about the criteria you currently use or will develop to select Mentor-Coaches. You will learn more about the characteristics of effective Mentor-Coaches and selection processes. You will also explore considerations for matching Mentor-Coaches with protégés.
- 4. Orienting and Training Mentor-Coaches.** In this section, you will gain insight into the types of support and resources that help Mentor-Coaches succeed in their work with staff. You can use this section to re-examine your current or proposed Mentor-Coach orientation and training practices.
- 5. Linking Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching to Your Program's Management Systems.** Here you will find effective strategies to connect your mentor-coaching effort with existing management systems. You will also find resources to support planning, evaluation, and resource allocation.

1. Selecting a Model for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching

“Choosing a mentor-coaching model for our program was quite a process. We learned that there is definitely not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.”
Head Start Director

Assembling a planning team for this work is a good strategy. This leadership team may include:

- Program managers
- Policy group representatives
- Key staff members

One of the first steps in designing a Mentor-Coach system is to select a model that is a good fit for your program. You can begin this selection process by considering these questions:

- Will our model include an additional cadre of staff that function purely as Mentor-Coaches?
- Will we combine the Mentor-Coach function with other job responsibilities?

The answers to these questions are influenced by the needs, resources, and characteristics of your program. When you meet with the leadership team to explore your options, discuss these factors that can impact your choice of a model:

- Program philosophy – Your program may have a philosophy of supervision that encompasses mentor-coaching. This is especially true if your program uses reflective supervision where current supervisors are already providing mentor-coaching support to staff. Or, your program may strongly believe that supervision and mentoring are separate and distinct functions that cannot be combined. (See page 24 of the Head Start publication, *Putting the PRO in Protégé* for more information on supervisors and mentors.)
- Organizational capacity – Your program may already have a multi-layer structure for staff support (education managers, coordinators, and site supervisors). Given that structure, you may decide that shifting or re-defining roles of existing staff to focus on mentor-coaching may be the best option.
- Financial resources – Keeping the mentor-coaching and supervision functions separate usually means adding a new group of staff. Even if your program considers this the best approach, the budget may not support additional hiring.

Your Head Start colleagues across the country are typically using one of three mentor-coaching models. Depending on your current realities, one of these models may be a good choice for your program.

Three commonly-used models for mentor-coaching in Head Start:

- Supervisors as Mentor-Coaches
- Mentor-Coaches as mentors only
- Peer teachers as Mentor-Coaches

Supervisors as Mentor-Coaches. Existing supervisors incorporate mentoring and coaching strategies into their work. They use strength-based approaches and reflective practices.

This model allows for building in-depth relationships between the Mentor-Coach and the protégé. The supervisor as Mentor-Coach can provide a comprehensive level of support to protégés. They focus on all areas of the individual's professional development. Thus, they are able to get the full picture of protégés' strengths and areas for improvement. Combining the role of the supervisor and Mentor-Coach also helps to keep lines of communication and accountability clear.

You may encounter resistance from supervisors who feel that mentor-coaching is an add-on to their long list of responsibilities. Helping Mentor-Coaches and protégés understand and accept new roles and responsibilities is key to the success of this model. You must allot sufficient time for supervisors who are Mentor-Coaches to meet frequently with staff. Depending on your current structure, this may mean adding hours to the supervisor positions or even adding more supervisors to your staff. Carefully consider a ratio of Mentor-Coaches to protégés that will allow for this expanded role.

Mentor-Coaches as Mentors Only. Programs hire additional staff or consultants as Mentor-Coaches. The role of the Mentor-Coach in this model is to help protégés build their language and literacy practices. Supervisors continue to fulfill the evaluative role.

The addition of these Mentor-Coaches defines mentor-coaching in a clear-cut way. This model usually increases the frequency and intensity of support to protégés. The absence of evaluation may help to lessen the anxiety of protégés. It may also take less time to develop the critical trusting relationship between Mentor-Coaches and protégés.

When adding this extra layer of staff support, you must carefully define the overlapping roles and responsibilities of Mentor-Coaches and supervisors. You must also establish clear lines of communication and accountability among Mentor-Coaches, supervisors, and protégés. Section 5 provides you with some guidelines for effective communication.

You may be challenged to find the financial resources to fund this model. To add this new group of staff, you must either secure supplemental funding or adjust your current budget. See Section 2 for further information about funding.

Peer Teachers as Mentor-Coaches. Programs use experienced and knowledgeable teachers as Mentor-Coaches. These teachers have teaching responsibilities for their own classrooms in addition to their Mentor-Coach work.

This model can help to build a sense of teamwork among teachers. Teachers as Mentor-Coaches are often seen as credible in the eyes of their peers. The Mentor-Coach and protégé relationship is built on the mutual understanding and respect that results from doing the same job. There is a sense of “being in this together.”

You can guard against the resentment that staff members sometimes feel when a peer is given special recognition or a promotion by involving all teachers in nominating candidates for peer mentors and by carefully making Mentor-Coach and protégé assignments. The **Matching Mentor-Coaches and Protégés** chart in Section 3 outlines factors to consider when making Mentor-Coach-protégé matches.

You have an opportunity to create or expand your program’s career ladder with this model. You can offer another avenue for the professional growth of experienced teachers. This may be very appealing to teachers who are not ready to take on a supervisory or management role yet are seeking a new challenge.

You need to consider the budget implications of this model. Teachers who are also Mentor-Coaches will need to have sufficient release time from their own classrooms to fulfill this role. You may need to add additional substitute coverage. Also, you may want to explore funding for pay increases or stipends for the Mentor-Coaches.

As you can see, choosing a model for mentor-coaching is somewhat complex. Involving your program’s leadership team in this decision-making process will help you to arrive at the best conclusion.

2. Finding Financial Resources for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching

"Our mentor-coaching system is an investment in our staff. Our teachers now see themselves as real professionals. They are proud of their work and as a result, our retention rates have improved significantly."
Mentor-Coach

Your program's Head Start teachers, supervisors, managers, leaders, and parents have all agreed that launching a mentor-coaching system will help bolster your program's language and literacy goals. No matter which of the three mentor-coaching models you have selected, you quickly come to the realization that you will need to gather additional resources to build an effective system. As you prepare to seek new funding sources, pursuit and persistence will be key factors in your success.

Pursuit. Begin by learning as much as possible about possible funders and their initiatives—we give you some “leads” later in this section. Subscribe to and watch for funding announcements. Regularly search key websites for information and funding announcements. One place to start is the National Child Care Information Center website: <http://www.nccic.org/poptopics/funding-opportunities.html>. Set your sights on a particular funder or funding initiative and pursue it. If possible, maintain contact with the funder, building a relationship with them. Talk with them about your ideas and the importance of a Mentor-Coach system for improving quality and child outcomes. Keep detailed files of information about your efforts: dates when you've had conversations with particular funders, funders' interests and questions, and follow-up information and contacts you need. Pursuit usually pays off and helps to spur the support your mentor-coaching funding initiative needs.

Persistence. As you work to secure additional funding, you may find that your initial efforts to acquire new resources fall short. It is critical to stay engaged even when a potential funder or collaborator says, “Sorry, we can't . . .” In seeking any new resources, your determination is often a measure of the effort's success. If you do not succeed at first, don't give up—try again! Look for ways to strengthen your efforts to secure funding. Consider securing the support of an influential colleague or community member to help promote the importance of a mentor-coaching system with particular funders. Or, you may need to refine or even rewrite an unsuccessful funding request sent to a new funder and resubmit it a second or even third time.

Below, you will find some possible funding strategies that you might want to pursue (and persist in pursuing) to get your program's Mentor-Coach system well established.

Partnerships. As you consider ways to financially support your program's mentor-coaching goals, be sure to examine how you might partner with child care, pre-kindergarten, or nearby Head Start programs to advance a mentor-coaching effort. Think big. While partnering initiatives take careful planning and significant time to be successful, their payoff is great. For example, partnerships can launch community-wide mentoring efforts that help to advance and align staff member's teaching practices across all early education programs. As you begin to organize a community effort with other programs to seek needed funding, you might discuss with your partners ways to blend existing resources to secure a mentor who can work across your programs. Often by blending limited resources, partnering programs can hire a full-time, highly-qualified mentor.

Municipal funding. Many cities and towns have a process for community programs to submit funding requests to the municipalities' decision makers. Talk or write to your community's leaders—the mayor, town council chairperson, school board official, to learn more about any available funding opportunities. Municipal decision makers will be more receptive to your request if you can establish a partnership with other public schools or early childhood education programs in your area and demonstrate how the mentoring initiative can benefit several of the early childhood programs in your community.

Local and/or state foundations. Early childhood education and services to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged populations remain a priority for many foundations. Learn about foundations that target your state— find links to many regional associations of grantmakers at http://fdncenter.org/funders/grantmaker/gws_comm/comm.html

Your local library will also likely have a foundation directory. Visit the foundations' websites to check out their priorities, funding cycles, the amount of the average funding awards, and submission specifications. You may also want to find out about other projects the foundation has funded. Consider contacting the recipients of those grants to learn more about their approach to soliciting foundation support and the particular foundation that supports their effort.

Other local sources. You may also want to check with your local Chamber of Commerce; service clubs such as Rotary or Kiwanis clubs; and corporate community (giving) programs associated with local banks, insurance companies, and large corporations.

Head Start funding opportunities. Watch for Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from the Head Start Bureau or your region's Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Head Start Office under which your ideas for a mentor-coaching system might fit. Head Start directors should talk with their ACF program specialists about financial needs related to mentor-coaching. Specialists may have ideas to share and alert directors to upcoming ACF funding opportunities.

State funding opportunities. Many states maintain e-mail lists that alert interested stakeholders to funding opportunities. Be sure that you are included on state e-mail lists or that you regularly search state websites for funding announcements. You might also want to maintain contact with groups in your state that stay abreast of such opportunities. When funding announcements are released, read them to determine their viability for funding your Mentor-Coach initiative. Many initiatives are established to improve learning outcomes for children, so be sure to link your initiative to improved child outcomes and establish systems for monitoring results of these searches.

U.S. Department of Education language and literacy initiatives. Many funding opportunities currently available through the U.S. Department of Education could easily incorporate mentor-coaching. Department of Education-funded programs such as Early Reading First, and the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development programs all focus on enhanced early language and literacy efforts in which mentor-coaching strategies can help support the particular initiative's goals. Your community may already have funding for one or more of these initiatives. Find out how you may become part of the effort and explore ways that a Mentor-Coach initiative could be woven into the next request for funding. If there is no funding in your community, read the U.S. Department of Education's funding announcements to determine if a Mentor-Coach initiative might be included in the request. Establish or join a community effort to be part of a funding request.

3. Selecting and Matching Mentor-Coaches

“Not everyone is capable of mentoring, even if they have a lot of knowledge. They need to be open regarding where the protégé is in her career.” Teacher

Characteristics:

- Professional Knowledge and Skill
- Functional Skills
- Personal Dispositions

Your careful selection of Mentor-Coaches—whether from your own program, from among local consultants, or from a local college or university—is critical to establishing an effective program. The work of content-focused Mentor-Coaches is complex. As they plan and implement their interactions with protégés, Mentor-Coaches must draw on knowledge of child and adult development, practical expertise in language and literacy teaching, and skills in working with adult learners. In addition, the personal characteristics that contribute to building trusting relationships are key to the success of Mentor-Coaches.

Characteristics of Successful Mentor-Coaches. As you develop your program, consider the following characteristics of successful Mentor-Coaches.

Professional knowledge and skill. Deep knowledge of language and literacy teaching and learning is essential if your Mentor-Coaches are to be respected and effective. They must be familiar with the most current research and understand how that research can be translated into classroom instruction. A thorough understanding of topics such as promoting children’s oral language, encouraging early writing, teaching concepts of print, and building phonological awareness are all important as is the capacity to assess children’s development and measure child outcomes in all of these areas.

Functional skills. As experienced teachers, Mentor-Coaches will model best practice for their protégés. Mentor-Coaches must have skills however, that stretch beyond being good teachers. They must be able to apply their professional knowledge to work with adult learners. The capacity to observe classroom practice and analyze those observations is central to the success of their work and to their ability to help the protégé in setting goals. In addition, they must use their understanding of adult development as they translate their observations into thought-provoking questions and design other interventions that will support individual protégé’s growth. They must be able to raise difficult issues with the protégé in a productive manner.

Personal dispositions. The personal skills of your Mentor-Coaches are also crucial to their success. They will need to communicate self-confidence and at the same time be open to other perspectives and to continued learning about the complexities of teaching young children. Friendliness, empathy,

and respect for their protégés must be balanced with an ability to maintain focus and productivity in their interactions and to individualize according to the learning styles and background of each protégé. While recognizing individual styles, Mentor-Coaches must also help protégés to focus on child outcomes.

In selecting a candidate, you should consider two issues only: Capability—what the candidate can do—and personality—what the candidate is like. Of these two, personality is by far the most important. Over 87 percent of all people fail not because of capability but because of personality. (Staley et al. 1986).

The Selection Process. *Putting the PRO in Protégé* outlines a four step selection process for mentoring programs. They recommend: a formal application, recommendations by previous colleagues and supervisors, a formal observation in each candidate’s classroom (assuming they are currently teaching), and a selection committee that reviews applications, interviews, and selects the mentors. While these are all important components of a selection process, you should start by thinking about the characteristics that you are looking for and believe are essential to your program. With these characteristics in mind you can develop a job description and tailor a selection process that is focused on finding the candidates that are best qualified for the job as you have defined it. (See page 14 for a sample job description.) As you develop your selection process, consider incorporating some of the following ideas:¹

Examining professional skills. Reviewing candidates’ resumes will give you important information about their academic background and current training in language and literacy. In order to capture a picture of their ability to translate theory into practice, do an observation in their classroom using a tool that is focused on literacy teaching. Use an interview to ask questions about their understanding of language and literacy teaching and learning. Think about the aspects of literacy development that are particularly important to you and ask questions about those. For example you might ask, “What are the most important ways that you build children’s vocabulary and why are these effective strategies?” Or, “What should young children be learning about writing? What are some of the ways you help them learn this?”

Examining functional skills. If your candidates have worked in some capacity with adults, recommendations from colleagues can provide important information about the skills they bring. Explain the skills you are looking for and ask for written recommendations to address them. In addition, engage candidates in an interview in which you pose hypothetical situations with protégés and ask how they would respond. “What if your protégé responds defensively when you suggest

¹ Interview approaches are adapted from Chalufour, I. (1993) *Effective Hiring Practices: A Look at Personality, Attitudes, and Skills*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

new book reading strategies?” Or, “What would you do if your protégé cancels two meetings in a row?” Ask the Mentor-Coach candidates to engage in a role play of a meeting with a protégé.

Personal dispositions. Colleague recommendations can also address dispositions, especially if you are clear about what you are looking for. Responses to situational questions will give you some of this information, also. When you ask applicants to explain why they would use particular approaches, their responses will reveal the underlying attitudes and beliefs that influence their work with adults. Further questioning can add more information. Try questions like: “Describe the best mentor/supervisor you have ever had.” “Describe your style of working with other adults.” “What qualities do you have that will contribute to successful mentoring?” “What do you hope to learn from this experience?”

Matching Mentor-Coaches and Protégés. The compatibility between a protégés and Mentor-Coaches is a key factor in their ability to form and sustain a trusting personal relationship. In ideal circumstances, decision makers have a number of highly qualified Mentor-Coaches to choose from when considering a Mentor-Coach-protégé match. In most Head Start programs, however, the pool of potential Mentor-Coaches may be limited. If you are responsible for linking Mentor-Coaches to protégés, there are steps that you can take to promote a positive Mentor-Coach and protégé match. In the chart that follows, we have identified a number of typical protégé characteristics that can influence relationships with Mentor-Coaches. You may want to refer to this chart as you consider your Mentor-Coach and protégé matches.

MATCHING MENTOR-COACHES AND PROTÉGÉS

<i>If the protégé is:</i>	<i>If possible, choose a Mentor-Coach who:</i>	<i>In all cases, the Mentor-Coach should:</i>
A new teacher or home visitor	Can direct teachers toward appropriate policies and procedures.	Become proficient about the policies and procedures in order to direct the teacher, particularly around language and literacy goals.
An experienced teacher or home visitor	Has had extensive experience in classrooms and understands classroom challenges.	Allow plenty of time for teachers to share their experiences and then build on them to address current language and literacy goals.
A second language learner	Speaks the second language.	Understand second language development. Take it slow and allow plenty of time for the protégé to respond to new information if there is a language barrier.
Quiet/shy	Has a supportive, non-threatening demeanor	Assess own general demeanor, discuss with colleague adjustments that might help. Videotape self to ensure proper demeanor. When conferencing, allow time to warm up before starting.
Young/Mature	Is a similar age or older than the protégé.	Recognize age differences and that there is much to learn from each other.
Open to new learning	Has the ability to challenge the protégé appropriately.	Ask many questions to learn where the protégé's interests and strengths are. What has the protégé been successful learning in the past?
Challenged by change	Understands the change process.	Help the protégé become more comfortable with change. Ask the protégé to imagine and describe what she will be doing in 5 years, or other alternative methods to get the protégé to think "outside of the box" about different practices.
Not from the program's dominant culture	Belongs to the protégé's culture.	Learn about the culture by talking with the protégé and others, and through self study.

Sample Job Description

Title: Early Literacy Mentor Coach (Mentor-Coach)

Hours: 40 hours per week, X weeks per year

Report to: Education Manager

Responsibilities

General:

Each Mentor-Coach will be responsible for supporting and engaging program staff, in individual and small group formats, building their capacity to promote the early language and literacy development of children in their classrooms or homes, including within the context of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. Mentor-Coaches will be an integral part of this program's literacy initiative, coordinating work with the other aspects of this initiative including: the in-service training program, the library and technology development project, the family literacy program, and program monitoring and evaluation.

Specific activities:

1. Recognize existing strengths of protégés and build positive, reflective mentor-coaching relationships.
2. Plan and conduct individual reflective conferences with each protégé twice a month. Activities must focus on the protégé's goals and should include: observation and conferencing, modeling and co-teaching, guided live or videotaped observation of other classrooms, sharing resources, and journaling.
3. Bring protégés together for in-person or on-line guided discussion once each month. Use readings, video tapes, or curriculum planning tasks to focus discussion in which protégés share their experiences and thinking with each other.
4. Participate in monthly Mentor-Coach meetings and trainings. Come to meetings prepared to share promising practices and current challenges.
5. Provide monthly documentation of work with protégés and submit to Education Manager one week prior to each Mentor-Coach meeting.
6. Contribute to efforts or other aspects of literacy initiative as requested. This will include helping to plan an in-service training program as it relates to early literacy, suggesting resources for the library and technology development project, and supporting protégés' work with families around literacy. Conduct formal evaluations of classroom practice as a part of the program's annual self-assessment.

Background and Qualifications:

Minimum of BA degree in Early Childhood or related field with documented recent training in early literacy.

Knowledge of and experience in:

- Head Start Program Performance Standards and Child Outcomes Framework
- Working with adult learners
- Early literacy development, child assessment, and teaching
- Working with diverse learners.

4. Orienting and Training Mentor-Coaches

A carefully planned ongoing process of orienting, training, and supporting your mentors will be essential to the success of your program. *Putting the PRO in Protégé* devotes a whole chapter to this subject. Use this valuable resource as you think through the content of your training and the ways you will provide ongoing support to your mentors.

Steps to Success: An Instructional Design for Early Literacy Mentor-Coaches in Head Start and Early Head Start is another valuable resource for you to use. This four-unit program includes training in skills essential to Mentor-Coaches as well as reviews of key concepts in early literacy teaching and learning. Both *Putting the PRO in Protégé* and *Steps to Success* include references to other resources that you will find helpful.

Whatever resources you are using, you will need to adapt them to the specific needs and unique characteristics of your program. As you develop your Mentor-Coach training program, be sure to take the following steps:

Make the Goals and Expectations of Your Mentoring Program Explicit. An important aspect of your Mentor-Coach orientation will be creating a common vision of what you want to accomplish and each person's responsibilities in relation to achieving these goals. Many programs use signed agreements between Mentor-Coaches and their protégés to ensure that responsibilities are understood. See a sample agreement on page 18.

Emphasize the Content Focus of this Work. An understanding of the teaching practices that effectively promote children's literacy development is essential to the success of your program. Be sure that your training provides a vision of the early literacy teaching that reflects your program's goals.

Provide Time To Build Functional Skills. While your mentors may have experience supervising, teaching, or mentoring adults, they may never have had training in the skills required to do this effectively. Practices that encourage teacher reflection are not easy to adopt without some training and practice. Be sure to include role plays, analysis

of video conferences, and reflection on their own work as they begin to mentor. These practical and analytical experiences will help your mentors develop these skills.

Address the Needs of the Mentors You Have Hired. It is unlikely that you will be able to find mentors with all of the knowledge and skills you are seeking. *Steps to Success* has self-assessments in each of the four units that address the literacy content of that unit and are keyed to suggested resources. Each unit also guides Mentor-Coaches through a reflection of their mentor-coaching skills. Mentor-Coaches complete the process by completing or revising their own Professional Development Plan.

Mentor your Mentors. Getting your program off to a good start is going to be key to your success. Put procedures in place that will ensure close communication with and monitoring of mentors' work. Work with them to develop goals for their growth based on their Professional Development Plan. Provide resources and ongoing support in the same way that you are expecting them to work with their protégés. Look for clues that they are having problems. Are their protégés cooperating with them? Are they using a variety of approaches to support the protégé's growth? Are their reports on time and providing you a picture of content-rich work with their protégés? Address issues before they become habits.

Establish a Mentor Library. There are many print, video, and electronic resources that Mentor-Coaches can use for ongoing support. Work with your Mentor-Coaches to gather resources that they can use to support their own development and that of their protégés. Look for lists of relevant mentoring and literacy resources at the end of this document and each *Steps to Success* unit. Each issue of *STEP-Notes*, the *Steps to Success* electronic newsletter posted on Head Start's STEP-Net (www.step-net.org), also contains a list of relevant resources.

SAMPLE: Mentor Coach and Protégé Agreement**This agreement describes:**

- 1) The relationship of the Mentor-Coach and the protégé.
- 2) The responsibilities that each share in this partnership.

The Mentor-Coach agrees to:

1. Develop an individualized mentoring plan with the protégé that includes early literacy-related goals related to improved child outcomes, steps for achieving goals, and the Mentor-Coach's and protégé's responsibilities related to each step.
2. Engage protégé in ongoing evaluation of progress toward goals.
3. Schedule, plan, and facilitate two onsite visits with protégé (three-hour minimum) per month. Incorporate observation and conferencing into visits regularly. Model early literacy teaching practices and co-teach with protégé according to the mentoring plan.
4. Provide other forms of support in relation to protégé goals (e.g., sharing resources, collaborative planning, and journaling).
5. Recognize the value of the protégé's time by keeping appointments and honoring start and ending times for meetings.
6. Keep work with the individual protégé confidential, sharing only the general information required in a reporting system. Obtain protégé's explicit permission to share information with others.

The Protégé agrees to:

1. Actively engage in goal setting and planning with the Mentor-Coach.
2. Arrange availability for two monthly onsite visits with the Mentor-Coach.
3. Fulfill responsibilities agreed to in the planning process in a timely way.
4. Contribute to ongoing assessment of progress toward goals.

- I have read the Mentor-Coach and Protégé Agreement.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the responsibilities that are described in the agreement.
- I understand my responsibilities as a Mentor-Coach or protégé.

Signature—Mentor-Coach

Date

Signature—Protégé

Date

5. Linking Early Literacy Mentor-Coaching To Your Program's Management Systems

"When we integrated mentoring into our program, it had a ripple effect that impacted everything we do. The result was not just improvement in classroom practice--our communication with parents is better, our recordkeeping is more mindful and systematic, and our staff now see that research has real relevance to their practice and consequently to child outcomes."

Head Start Director

Mentor-coaching's new relationships may challenge your program's existing ideas about communication and confidentiality.

Many programs try out mentoring through a small pilot project. They hire or promote one or two mentors to work with new teachers or a pilot center. They then collect data to see how well mentoring supports the program's teachers and services to children. Some programs even conduct a formal evaluation. They usually do not, however, change their written policies, plans, and procedures right away.

If your program expands your pilot mentoring project or launches a new permanent, program-wide mentoring effort, however, you and other decision makers will need to build the project into your management system and written plans. We have already explored mentor-coaching's place within some aspects of the Human Resources and Fiscal Management systems. In the sections that follow, we look at ways that you can connect your mentoring efforts to several of your other systems.

Communication. Mentor-coaching introduces new kinds of relationships to your Head Start program. These relationships may challenge your program's existing ideas about communication and confidentiality. This is especially true when the Mentor-Coach is not the protégé's supervisor.

Consider the following examples:

- A peer mentor observes her protégé in an action that goes against program policies. She wants to share her observation with the supervisor, but worries about losing the protégé's trust.
- A non-supervising Mentor-Coach has not been able to help the protégé to change an inappropriate or harmful behavior. She would like to ask for the supervisor's help, but worries about breaking confidentiality.
- The supervisor asks the Mentor-Coach to evaluate and report on the protégé's skills. The Mentor-Coach feels uncomfortable with the request, but worries about losing her position if she doesn't cooperate.
- The protégé feels that the Mentor-Coach is not providing adequate support, but doesn't know who to share her concerns with.

You can help staff to navigate through these difficult situations in a number of ways. First, ensure that Mentor-Coaches, protégés, and program managers share a common vision of the Mentor-Coach's role. Encourage the Mentor-Coach and the supervisor to view themselves as two halves of the protégé's support team and help them guard against falling into the "good cop, bad cop" model of supervising and mentoring. Clearly define chains of communication and confidentiality within the Mentor-Coach and protégé relationship and formalize these definitions within your communication plan, and Mentor-Coach and protégé agreements. Finally, provide training to Mentor-Coaches, protégés, and managers to ensure that they understand the definitions and protocols.

Record-Keeping and Reporting. Mentor-Coaches, like all other staff in your program, need to account for their work. By creating easy-to-use Mentor-Coach record-keeping and reporting systems, you can:

- Help Mentor-Coaches plan for and track how they accomplish the duties described in the job description.
- Provide supervisors with information about the Mentor-Coaches' performance.
- Generate data that you and other decision makers can use for planning.

Programs use a variety of ways to help Mentor-Coaches track their work. Some Mentor-Coaches use a running narrative to record their ongoing interactions with their protégés. Others use a standardized reporting form. (See a sample recording form at the end of this section.) In some programs, Mentor-Coaches make a copy of the forms—one for their own file and the second for the protégé's personal records. The important thing is that all Mentor-Coaches within the program use the same system.

You may wish to engage the Mentor-Coaches in deciding the approach that works best for your program. This involvement often creates buy-in and builds Mentor-Coaches' understanding of the your expectations.

In many programs, Mentor-Coaches submit a regular, often monthly, report to the mentor-coaching manager. These reports usually contain data about the number and types of meetings that the Mentor-Coach has had with all protégés, as well as the focus of the support provided. (See the

sample monthly reporting form provided. You may wish to design your reporting system in an Excel or other database format for easy tabulation.)

While the process will vary from organization to organization, the final step in the record-keeping and reporting system is to provide a report to the program director, governing body and Policy Council.

Ongoing Monitoring. Collecting data and checking on its accuracy through regular spot-checks are important first steps in monitoring a mentor-coaching program. By regularly reviewing and analyzing these data, you and other managers can make sure that the effort is progressing as planned. You can also discover mentoring and other program issues that you can address and correct immediately.

Consider the following examples:

- When she reviewed February's monthly Mentor-Coach reports, the mentor-coaching manager notes that only one of seven Mentor-Coaches completed observation and reflection conferences with all of their protégés. She recalls that the figures were similar in January. She wonders if the Mentor-Coaches' workloads are too heavy or if the Mentor-Coaches are simply struggling with conferencing because it is a new skill for them. She decides to discuss conferencing with each Mentor-Coach during their regular supervision meetings. She will help each Mentor-Coach develop a plan to meet the program's conferencing expectations.
- The XYZ Head Start education manager regularly reviews reports from his program's two Mentor-Coaches. From the reports, he learns that over half of the protégés are working on goals related to phonological awareness. Although the program has offered training on this topic in the past, he wonders whether it might be time to provide additional training on the topic. He plans to raise the issue at his next Mentor-Coach staff meeting.

In each of these situations, the monthly report provides important, yet incomplete information about the mentor-

coaching project. If the managers did not probe for additional information, they would miss information that could inform program decisions. Effective managers continue to ask questions, review data from other sources (e.g., child outcomes data), and assess classroom environments until they are confident about the progress of the program. If analysis of data reveals issues or problems, they collect data to identify the source(s) of the issue and develop a plan for addressing them.

"The reflective practice that is at the core of our mentor-coaching is also central to our self-assessment. We reflect on our work with children, with families—what is working, what else can we try, what should we do differently to make our program and practice the best it can be?" Mentor-Coach

Self-Assessment. Programs that conduct pilot mentor-coaching projects will often conduct a formal evaluation to look at the results of the effort. *Putting the PRO in Protégé* provides information on conducting both process and outcome evaluations.

If your mentor-coaching effort is a permanent part of your program, you will need to review it during your annual self-assessment of your human resources systems. As part of the assessment, your teams will need to collect both process and outcome information. Although the program has been regularly collecting and reviewing information through its record-keeping and ongoing monitoring systems, the annual self-assessment can help program staff, parents, and community members look at the impact of the effort over time.

As your team collects process information, they will want to find out if the project is operating as planned. They may ask questions such as: Were the Mentor-Coaches hired? What type of training did they receive? Did the Mentor-Coaches complete their assigned meetings? What barriers, if any, prevented the Mentor-Coaches from completing their assignments? How did the protégés feel about the support they received?

The teams will need to understand the original goal or goals of the project before they can gather outcome information. For example, if the goal was to improve teacher skills, the assessment team will want to review ongoing monitoring data, ask questions, and review results of formal assessment instruments to find out about teacher growth. If the overall goal was to improve child outcomes, the team might want to review results of child assessments. They may also choose to interview staff and parents. If the project has multiple goals, the assessment

team will need to craft a combination of data collection strategies to find out if the effort has been successful.

Assessment teams may want to:

- Review monthly reports from Mentor-Coaches and the mentor-coaching manager.
- Interview protégés individually or in groups to find out what they think about the system and how it could be improved.
- Interview Mentor-Coaches individually or in groups.
- Review results of protégé or classroom observation instruments conducted both before and after the mentoring effort to look for changes in teacher practice.
- Review child assessment data to look for changes that could be linked to the Mentor-Coaches' work.

When reviewing the self-assessment data, look for trends or patterns that emerge (e.g., protégés who received regular observation and conferencing support were more likely to find mentoring useful). Also, look for results that stand out from others (e.g., a center that has done particularly well or has unique issues). Both types of results are important for ongoing planning.

Planning. Ongoing monitoring and self-assessment can provide you with large amounts of data. We have already discussed how you can make mid-course corrections in your mentoring and other program efforts by regularly looking at information as it is collected. You and other decision makers can also make good longer-term decisions by reviewing the data during your annual goal setting process.

At that time, assess the mentoring effort itself. You can begin the planning process by posing questions such as: Is the program effective? If not, can it be improved? Is it worth the investment? How much time and money will it cost to continue as is? How much time and money will it cost to improve the program? If the data tell you that you should continue the effort, you and other program decision makers can then set new goals, objectives, and action steps that may include changes or adjustments in staffing, funding, or activities of the Mentor-Coaches.

Also, think about what the mentor-coaching data tell you about other parts of your program. For example, information from Mentor-Coach reports may point to training needs of teaching staff. Focus group discussions with mentor-coaching staff may provide information about needs of families (e.g., family literacy services) that family services or parent involvement staff can address.

Putting it All Together. Because of its comprehensive nature, mentor-coaching is a staff development approach that intersects many systems and services within a Head Start program. Program leaders who manage successful mentor-coaching initiatives carefully follow many of the steps for decision makers outlined in this guide. We have included the guide on the following page as a planning resource.

Developing Your Mentor-Coaching System – A Planning Tool

The checklist below summarizes important benchmarks in planning and implementing your mentor-coaching system. The items are organized into the five sections of the *Decision Maker Guide*. You can use this tool to keep you on track and document your progress.

1) SELECTING A MODEL FOR EARLY LITERACY MENTOR-COACHING

- Assembled a decision-making team
- Examined program philosophy regarding mentoring and supervision
- Examined policy regarding role of Mentor-Coach on internal program career development system
- Considered financial resources and organizational capacity
- Selected a model:
 - Strengths of the model _____
 - Potential challenges _____

2) FINDING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Explored reallocation of funds in current Head Start budget
 - Proposed a budget and services revision to the ACF Regional Office Specialist
 - Received ACF approval
- Identified need to secure additional funding
 - Developed a plan for identifying and contacting potential funding sources.

3) SELECTING AND MATCHING MENTOR-COACHES

- Developed a job description
- Selected a Mentor-Coach application process
- Designed interview strategies
- Developed and adopted criteria for Mentor-Coach and protégé matching.

4) ORIENTING AND TRAINING MENTOR-COACHES

- Developed an orientation plan specifically for Mentor-Coaches
- Individualized the plan for each Mentor-Coach to meet their particular needs
- Established system of supervision and ongoing support for Mentor-Coaches
- Designed and adopted a Mentor-Coach and protégé agreement.

5) LINKING MENTOR-COACHING TO PROGRAM MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Communication

- Established protocols for communication between Mentor-Coaches and supervisors and between Mentor-Coaches and other program staff
- Defined confidentiality within the Mentor-Coach and protégé relationship
- Provided training to staff on the communication protocols
- Incorporated the protocols into the written program plans.

Record-Keeping and Reporting

- Designed forms to document the ongoing interactions between Mentor-Coaches and protégés
- Designed a form for tracking the work of the Mentor-Coaches
- Defined the role of the Mentor-Coach and other staff members in the record-keeping process
- Developed protocols and timelines for completion and submission of written documents.

Ongoing Monitoring

- Incorporated the review and analysis of information about the Mentor-Coach program into the system for ongoing monitoring.

Self-Assessment

- Determined the type of information about the mentor-coaching program to be collected in the annual self-assessment
- Developed procedures and responsibilities for collecting these data.

Planning

- Incorporated the review and analysis of information about the Mentor-Coach program into the program planning system
- Developed a process for using the data to inform continuous quality improvement.

SAMPLE Mentor-Coach and Protégé Interaction Record

MENTOR-COACH _____

PROTÉGÉ _____

DATE _____

TYPE OF INTERACTION:

- Initial Meeting
- Resource Sharing/Discussion
- Mentor-Coach Modeling/co-teaching
- Pre-Observation Conference
- Observation
- Post-Observation Conference
- Small Group Meeting
- Other

PRIMARY EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY FOCUS OF INTERACTION:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Listening And Understanding ○ Speaking and Communicating ○ Phonological Awareness ○ Book Knowledge and Appreciation ○ Print Awareness and Concepts ○ Early Writing ○ Alphabet Knowledge ○ Social-Emotional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individualizing for Children with Disabilities ○ Using Assessment Data to Support Children’s Growth ○ Specific Child ○ Other _____ ○ Other _____ ○ Other _____
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Visit Summary:

Visit Summary (Continued)

Goals Developed	Next Steps/Strategies	Resources Needed	Child Outcomes Addressed	Timelines	Person(s) Responsible

Individualizing for Children with Disabilities								
Using Assessment Data to Support Children								
Other								
Other								
Other								
Suggested Training Topics for Teachers								
Other Recommendations								

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