



# Mentoring Matters

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Yearbook students at President Theodore Roosevelt High School in Honolulu discuss some issues about their publication with Bill Flechtner, Oregon mentor. Flechtner was visiting mentee Jennifer Young's class. Flechtner worked with Young long distance and was able to schedule a visit during a trip to Hawai'i.

Photo by Jennifer Young

## LONG-DIST@NCE RELATIONSHIPS MANAGEABLE WITH STRATEGIES

by *Linda Barrington, MJE*

"My mentee, Rachel Urban, is a three-hour drive from me," Kansas mentor Mary Anne McCloud said. "I visited her school several times and realized it was taking seven hours just for a one-hour meeting."

Drive time is an obvious drawback when establishing a good relationship between mentor and mentee. Once McCloud and Urban had met a few times, they eliminated the drive and switched to FaceTime.

"We 'met' monthly by appointment and had our conversations, and we quickly developed a working relationship," Mc-

Cloud said. "She was able to show me her room and how they organized responsibilities for the newspaper, and I think we both felt that we had good conversations." That's good for effective mentoring.

Another advantage of electronic communication is the mentor is not exhausted from the drive time. Even with mentees in the same metropolitan area, mentors may drive an hour or more through traffic, stop lights and freeways for a 30-meeting. They may find themselves stressed from the drive but needing to be "on" for the meeting. It can be both frustrating and tiring for them.

Mentors work primarily with new advisers from their own state. But many,

like McCloud, still have long distances to drive to reach them for a meeting.

The long-distance challenges became more apparent when mentors began working with mentees in other states that did not have any JEA mentors. Bill Flechtner was one of the first to do this and, as a member of the Mentor Committee, he began recording the additional challenges. [See challenges chart on the next page.]

### Developing Strategies

Flechtner and other long-distance mentors then began to develop strategies that would be helpful in maintaining regular communication and a good relationship. [See strategies chart on the next page.]



“I HAVE CREATED SOME FOLDERS IN MY GOOGLE DRIVE WHERE I SHARE RESOURCES, BASED ON TOPIC. THIS HAS BEEN AN EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE METHOD TO GET HELP TO MY MENTEES WITHIN 12 TO 24 HOURS OF THEM ASKING. SO OFTEN WHAT I SHARE WITH ONE, I SHARE WITH ALL AND THEY CAN GO GRAB IT IF THEY NEED IT.”

VICKY BRENNAN, FLORIDA MENTOR

In Pennsylvania, mentor Kathy Zwiebel communicates with her mentees by email, phone and FaceTime regularly.

“Sue Dacey and I also used FaceTime with her class,” Zwiebel said, “plus we each drive half way and meet at a diner.”

Like many other mentors, she sends her mentees information, sample publications and handouts regularly.

“It works. They all know I’m just an email or phone call away,” Zwiebel said.

Mike Riley climbs mountains for his mentees, literally, in his 2006 Toyota Tundra pickup as he drives from Cody to the western plains of Wyoming to visit two mentees and then across the Wyoming mountains to visit another two in Idaho. He does this sparingly and in good weather.

“I’ve helped my mentees most by being available through texting, Skyping, and e-mailing,” Riley said. “Giving them information about JEA’s benefits, resources and conventions seems to be first, and then as individual needs arise, we’ve been able to build relationships.”

He has conducted workshops for their classes via Skype and has also visited their classrooms when he’s had time for an extended trip.

“I’ve watched their programs grow, and that has been rewarding,” Riley said.

#### In Another Country

Not all long-distance relationships face the same obstacles. Another Wyoming mentor, Katherine Patrick, has the added challenge of working with a mentee in another country.

“David Gold and I have a sporadic relationship, but I believe that he has been very successful with his program thus far,” Patrick said. “He teaches in a private school in Medellin, Colombia, so his location presents some interesting thoughts about the First Amendment, which we have discussed.”

“My biggest frustration is that their on-

**STRATEGIES  
for Long-Distance Mentoring**

- Mentors and mentees decide how they will communicate and what seems to be working best.
- They establish and define regularity of contact.
- Mentors and mentees clarify how to maintain contact and what flexibility means for each of them.
- Mentors request examples of media and other materials.
- It’s beneficial to allow time for reflection.
- Mentors help mentees set goals and other points of connection.
- Mentors decide how/in what manner/how often to share information and resources. Mentees may have different preferences.

- from Bill Flechtner, Mentor Committee member

**CHALLENGES  
of Long-Distance Mentoring**

- Developing a relationship with a mentee takes longer.
- Mentors can expect a longer than anticipated response time.
- Communicating responses can be time-consuming as mentors must decide what/how much to write.
- Mentors must decide on their response time to a crisis.
- When a relationship is not going well/not going to be maintained, mentors decide what to do next.
- Mentors must decide if or when to visit face-to-face. Some distances are just too far for a mentor to consider this.
- Developing a questioning strategy that is encouraging, not intimidating, is difficult when people aren’t face-to-face.

- from Bill Flechtner, Mentor Committee member

line newspaper is viewable by only school employees, students and parents, so I have never seen it. David is hoping to get me a password, but this might be a barrier we will never overcome,” Patrick said.

Washington mentor Joy Lessard attributes her close relationship with her long-distance mentee, Anna Ferdinand, to their emails and phone calls. They live 250 miles from each other.

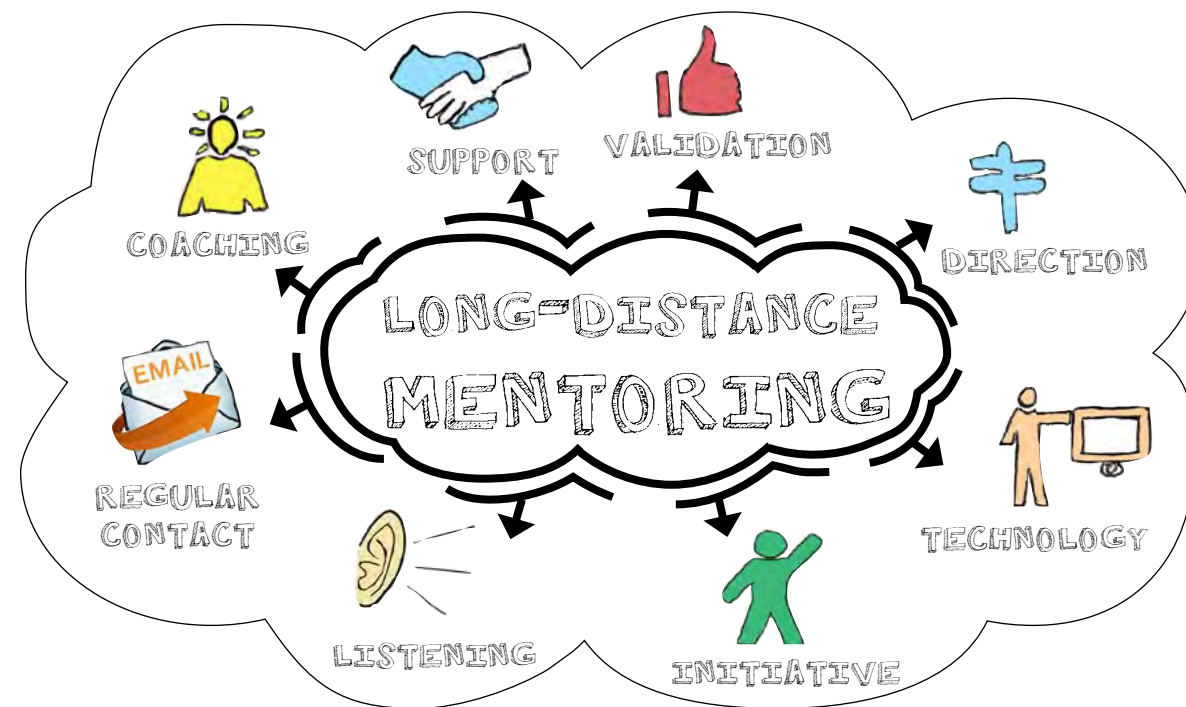
“Any time she emailed me with a question,” Lessard said, “I was able to get back to her within the day to offer advice. I think just writing out the issue in an email allowed her to think it through before I became involved; therefore, she was able to pinpoint more than one way to approach the problem at hand.”

Arizona mentor Peggy Gregory worked last year with Courtney Schulz, her mentee from Tennessee.

“I feel like we had a very trusting relationship,” Gregory said. “We started off with a couple of introductory telephone calls, and then we went to emails for communication.”

She asked advice on several things throughout the year from curriculum to staff relationships to issues with student reporting. Gregory did some “gentle” critiques of a couple of issues that Courtney had shared via PDFs.

“I think the advice I gave on improving leads was well received,” Gregory said. “On the other hand, I didn’t get too picky because it was her first year advising (though not teaching), and the paper was really in pretty good shape with continuing staff members. Also, I didn’t want email comments to be misconstrued since we didn’t have the face-to-face relationship.”



#### Mentor Toolbox

One of the mentor tools is a Collaborative Assessment Log. This log guides conversation in four areas and allows the mentor and/or mentee to record detail, including what’s working and what’s not, and how the mentor and mentee will each follow up, a kind of to-do list.

“Although Courtney was a long-distance mentee, I sent her a log at the end of the year — almost as an after-thought,” Gregory said.

“I told her it was really optional since we had discussed the four areas already to some extent, but because she is very conscientious, she filled it out and sent it back,” Gregory said.

Many mentors and mentees like using the log as it gives the mentees the chance to think through the positive portions of their teaching/year as well as what they want to work on.

“Courtney’s next steps were to really work on curriculum over the summer,” Gregory said. “She shared much of that work via Google docs, and I was able to weigh-in with suggestions in some of the areas.”

Meanwhile, another Arizona mentor, Carmen Wendt, met her Oklahoma mentee, Jennifer Hill, through a phone conversation.

“We talked about an hour,” Wendt said, “and found much common ground, both in and out of the classroom. The advantage of the phone is you must focus on

**Feedback:  
Making Sense**

When new advisers are overwhelmed the first year, they often have difficulty articulating what they need help with. Mentors try to make sense of their frustrations to provide support.

the voice, which zeros in your attention. Whether it is FaceTime or the phone, technology puts us together in real time and allows for that relationship building very quickly.”

In northern Florida, mentor Vicky Brennan has three long-distance mentees, two of them within a two-hour driving distance. She has found that she uses email, text and phone to communicate

with them, just as she does with her local mentees.

“I have created some folders in my Google Drive where I share resources, based on topic,” Brennan said. “This has been an extremely effective method to get help to my mentees within 12 to 24 hours of them asking. I’ve found that several have similar needs at the same time, so often what I share with one, I share with all and they can go grab it if they need it.”

Telephone calls work best for two-way communication with her mentees.

“I don’t have a great deal of history on which to base this,” Brennan said, “but I think my long-distance mentoring relationships are at least as effective as my local ones.”

Whether mentees are local or long-distance, they all share some of the same difficulties of new teachers. When new advisers are overwhelmed their first year, they often have difficulty articulating what they need help with. Mentors try to make sense of their frustrations to provide support.

Of course, it’s good to see another teacher in action, and nice to meet and work with the students, but as far as being able to offer immediate help in coaching, collaborating, listening, providing resources and offering support, experience has shown that distance isn’t necessarily an insurmountable obstacle.





Sharing experiences, Janice Hatfield (left), Carol Eanes (center) and Phyllis Cooper reflect on Share a Situation and Strategy during the Mentor Forum at the JEA/NSPA Convention in Orlando in 2015. The Forum, following mentor training strategies from the New Teacher Center, promotes interactive work and sharing of best practices.

Photo by Mary Anne McCloud

# BACK IN CLASS

by Linda Barrington, MJE

*On the Thursday of each JEA/NSPA convention opening, mentors attend class at an all-day Mentor Forum to brush up on mentoring techniques, learn new technology and share strategies for helping their mentees — all the while, developing friendships with one another.*

**W**hen mentors were advising publications, they loved spending time with their students. They now transfer that enthusiasm to their relationships with their mentees because they genuinely love journalism and value the experience journalism offers students.

“This energy, humor, wisdom and joy that is exhibited by the mentors makes the forum a fun reunion,” Joy Lessard, a Washington mentor, said. “You cannot come away from the forum without being energized and eager to help your mentees.”

Learning more ways to do this is the focus of the forum. Planning starts several months in advance by members of the Mentoring Committee, all of whom are mentors themselves. They brainstorm topics that will most help mentors with their work and ask for suggestions from the mentors via their own mentor listserv.

“The mentors are good at expressing those areas that they feel they need additional training in,” Bill Flechtner said. He is an Oregon mentor on the Mentoring Committee.

“We often look for expertise outside our group,” Peggy Gregory said. “Of late, that has been someone with knowledge in digital media.” Chair of the JEA Digital Media Committee, Aaron Manfull has been a repeat presenter at forums, keeping mentors updated on the latest developments in social media and digital communication. Florida mentor Megan Fitzgerald appreciates these updates, even though she is still a classroom teacher.

“It’s an incredible opportunity for me to stay current on topics such as technology and media law that are important to advising and teaching journalism,” she said.



▲ Mentors Ann Visser and Bob Bair work as part of a group at the Los Angeles forum last spring, with a Word-O-Gram, an activity in which they take mentor-related words and group them as they think they are most logical. Then each group listened to the others’ explanations and reacted. “It was a great sharing activity,” Peggy Gregory said.

Photo by Peggy Gregory



◀ At the Orlando Forum last fall, mentors Linda Ballew and Carmen Wendt discuss strategies for success. Mentors described to each other a situation or event they considered a success in their mentoring practice.

Photo by Mary Anne McCloud

Holding the forum at the national convention was the most logical choice for the Mentor Committee. It’s the perfect place to stay connected to the world of scholastic journalism.

“Besides attending the forum, mentors present and attend sessions, critique publications and judge Write-offs,” Flechtner said. “This keeps mentors current with what is really happening in media classrooms, which is essential to be relevant to the new advisers who are being mentored.”

The forums offer the mentors a chance to reconnect and to share common experiences so that they do not feel isolated or dealing with unique situations.

“All mentors have common experiences and can help others facing a situation for the first time,” Flechtner said. “The collaboration at the forums has been terrific. Everyone seems willing to offer suggestions and strategies to deal with the issues presented.”

Mentors also benefit from the experiences that other mentors share about their worth with their mentees. Vermont mentor, Nancy Olson, said she learned how often mentees face similar challenges in other parts of the country. Olson is the only mentor in her state.

“When I was a journalism teacher, I worked in isolation as the only journalism teacher in my school,” Olson said. “As a

mentor, I still work in isolation, so meeting face-to-face at these forums is helpful. I benefit as a mentor from the wisdom and experience of mentors more experienced than I; therefore, I am able to serve my mentees more effectively.”

Because every mentoring situation is unique, the JEA Mentor Program is built on this premise. Each mentor tailors assistance to mentees based on the mentee’s circumstances and needs. That’s why it is so important and enriching for mentors to hear from one another at the forum about the work they do with their mentees.

“Some of the most positive aspects of the forums for me were the opportunities to hear about the diverse programs many of our members have created and are fostering,” Wyoming mentor Katherine Patrick said. “Seeing our mentors in action is inspiring.”

Every mentor brings a different range of information and background to the mentoring experience, just as their teaching styles are different.

“The forum is great way for me to connect with other mentors and learn more about their successes so that I can incorporate these into my own mentoring,” Fitzgerald said.

Inevitably, as mentors get to know one another at the forums, they develop friendships since they all share a similar career experience and love of journalism.

“Mentors also reconnect with colleagues from throughout the nation and build a special bond,” Flechtner said. “Mentors have vast experience and are providing a service that no other group in scholastic journalism is able to do.”

The forums, then, provide ample opportunity for refreshing old ideas, learning new strategies and developing resources from the connections with other mentors. They help mentors do their job well.

“It is our pleasure to advise advisers,” Lessard said. “We WANT new advisers to find the same passion we found as we guided young journalists. It’s an exclusive club, this adviser business, that casts a wide net that not only positively affects student journalists while they are in high school, but stays with them as they navigate their way in their adult lives.”

Those mentors who are on the Mentor Committee and plan the forums also feel strongly about their work with mentors.

“Being on the Mentor Committee has been some of the most rewarding volunteer work I have ever done,” Gregory said. “Each time we meet, I am in awe of and inspired by the wealth of information these mentors have, the work they have done previously with their students and the incredible ways they are reaching out to new advisers. I am proud to be a part of this group.”



**SCHOOL FOCUS**



Students at Malvern Prep School in Malvern, Penn., are excited to learn that their “The Blackfriar Chronicle” newspaper is a CSPA crown winner. Their adviser, Kate Plows, is mentored by Kathleen Zwiebel. Being an adviser is “like outer space,” Plows said. “The more you learn the bigger it gets, the more humble you feel.” Zwiebel said she “has a committed staff and its members work very hard to keep improving the paper.”

*Photo provided by Kathy Zwiebel*

**FUNDING**  
**FUNDERS ARE CATALYSTS OF CHANGE**

Without the support of state funders and the Yellow Chair Foundation, the JEA Mentor Program would not exist.

Because of their support, these funders are actually catalysts of change. They make possible the work of the mentors with new advisers who help to transform the teachers and the journalism programs in their schools.

This is not an exaggeration. While JEA provides generous funding for the training of mentors – both initial and ongoing training at national conventions – and funding for marketing and postage, it is the state-level funders and the Yellow Chair Foundation that provide the funding for the mentors’ stipends.

The costs may seem modest, but they add up when you realize that there are 40 JEA mentors across the country. The recommended stipend is \$2,500 a year for mentoring a minimum of two mentees all year. This honorarium helps the mentor defray the costs of travel, as well as miscel-

laneous purchases a mentor may make to help out a needy mentee, like a textbook or camera or other resource.

The scholastic press associations listed in the box at the right are a critical component in the Mentor Program. Mentors are encouraged to stay connected with their state and regional organizations.

Mentors need to know what opportunities are available to their mentees right in their own state. Mentors should attend the SPA events themselves and offer to do a session. They should encourage their mentees to attend and plan to meet them there.

There is another group of funders who play an important part in securing mentors’ stipends: That is the many professional press organizations who have supported the program for years.

This year, professional press associations in Illinois, Iowa, Oregon and Wisconsin continue to support the Mentor Program. We are grateful for their support as they help to improve scholastic journalism in their states.

**FUNDERS PROVIDE SUPPORT**

Thank you to the state scholastic press associations who support the JEA Mentor program by providing some or all of the cost of stipends for mentors in their state.

- Alabama Scholastic Press Assn
- Arizona Interscholastic Press Assn
- Colorado Student Media Assn
- Florida Scholastic Press Assn
- Garden State Scholastic Press Assn
- Iowa High School Press Assn
- Kansas Scholastic Press Assn
- Kent State Center for Scholastic Journalism
- Kettle Moraine Press Assn (WI and IL)
- Montana JEA
- Nebraska High School Press Assn
- North Carolina Scholastic Media Assn
- Northwest Scholastic Press Assn
- Pennsylvania School Press Assn
- Southern California JEA
- Tennessee High School Press Assn
- Washington JEA
- Wyoming HS Student Press Assn

**MENTEES’ COMMENTS: THIS IS WHAT HAVING A JEA MENTOR MEANS TO US**



“As a younger adviser, I grew up in the age of technology. I adapt to new technology quickly and always try to utilize it in my journalism class and school newspaper publication. Still, as a first-year journalism teacher and only a fourth-year adviser, I knew that I could certainly use help when it came to lesson planning, and newspaper staff structure and workflow. That’s why I’m so thankful and grateful to my JEA mentor, Ron Bonadonna. He has been an adviser and journalism teacher for decades, and even in his retirement, he’s very active within several different journalism organizations. He knows the time-tested strategies that, technology or not, work for not only me but also my students. He’s always available to help, and it’s very clear that he painstakingly takes the time to give the most thorough answer he can. More than anything though, I value his support. He believes in me and sees the best in me, especially when I don’t see it in myself. He gives me courage to try new things and keep my head up, while keeping my nose to the grindstone.”

*Alana Van Der Sluys, Pascack Hills High School, Montvale, New Jersey*



**Susan Dacey**  
Boyertown Area Senior High School  
Boyertown, Pennsylvania

“Having Kathy Zwiebel as a mentor has been invaluable. In my first two years as newspaper adviser, we had somewhat successfully moved our little-read print publication online. However, I was frustrated by a lack of readership and a lack of dedication by club staff members. Kathy gave me great advice as I petitioned to make journalism a for-credit class and had the staff produce a magazine in addition to the website. During our first phone conversation, her enthusiasm and plethora of ideas about what I could do to improve our school’s program revived my spirits. Later that year, she Skyped with my staff and thoroughly critiqued our site for us. She also has given me a ton of sample



**Hillary Currier**  
Tigard High School  
Tigard, Oregon

student publications to look at and staff manual materials.”

“It can be lonely being the only journalism and yearbook teacher in the building. There is never anyone with whom to talk shop or seek advice. Luckily, I have my JEA Mentor, Bill Flechtner. Besides being another adult to talk to about improving design or teaching writing, he has also been another set of eyes on sensitive stories. He has also helped guide me to JEA resources like the website with its curriculum guide, the email listserve and the conventions. Now I feel like I’m part of a community of like-minded educators. I’m not so lonely anymore. Thanks, Bill.”



**Nichole Folkman**  
Hartsburg-Emden High School  
Hartsburg, Illinois

“My only journalism experience was making my own high school yearbook as a student. It was only a club and there was no training or standards whatsoever. I went to NCTE and found out about JEA and their mentorship program and I was thrilled because finally I had someone to go to with all my questions. Our publications serve grades 6-12, so we have some unique challenges in coverage. Because of my JEA mentor Carol Smith and her encouragement to my students, we were recognized as a Most Inclusive School by our yearbook publisher. Isn’t it funny that sometimes it takes someone our students don’t already know to acknowledge them and their work for them to realize that what we’re saying really is true? Having a JEA mentor provides that much needed push for my students.”

**Meaghan Moran**  
Milwaukee High School of the Arts  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“As a new teacher without a background in journalism, the thought of teaching this class was extremely overwhelming. However, I knew what a great opportunity it would be for my students and my school, so I agreed to do it. Having a mentor has made the arduous journey of starting a newspaper much more manageable. Linda [Barrington] has supported me by providing me with resources, giving me advice on planning and grading, and helping me look ahead to where I want to take my newspaper. Without such a knowledgeable and passionate mentor, my students and I would be very stuck. Although I still have a lot to learn, I am excited about the prospects ahead because I know I don’t have to do it alone.”



# 10<sup>TH</sup> CADRE OF NEW MENTORS READY TO SUPPORT MENTEES



Steve Wahlfeldt, Colorado



Joy McCaleb, Tennessee



Karl Grubaugh, California

by Linda Barrington, MJE

The bell rings, the doors close and each new teacher is alone, in charge of a class, for the first time.

Sink or swim.

And that isn't right.

The Mentor Program was founded on the idea that new advisers shouldn't have to find their way alone, especially when great journalism teachers who are at or near retirement, are excited to mentor new advisers.

Each summer, the Mentor Committee trains a new cadre of mentors, eager to work with new advisers.

Three new mentors participated in Mentor Training this past July at the JEA Advisers' Institute in Las Vegas. Each of them has a background in professional journalism, but turned to teaching as their career.

**K**arl Grubaugh, CJE, has jumped into mentoring ahead of schedule. Unlike

most of the other mentors, he is still teaching and advises the Granite Bay (Calif.) Gazette newspaper and GraniteBayToday.org news website at Granite Bay High School.

"It's a challenge doing this while I'm still in the classroom full-time, but I'm glad I'm able to pay it forward a little and help out some younger advisers," Grubaugh said.

**S**teve Wahlfeldt retired as newspaper adviser at Rocky Mountain High School, in Fort Collins, Colo., in May, completing 26 years in education. He came to high school teaching and advising after several years as a professional journalist. His combination of real life reporting experience, attention to detail and his genuine love of students helped build a great newspaper program at his high school. He was also the Colorado Adviser of the Year in 2006.

"Being a JEA mentor has been an experience beyond my expectations," Wahlfeldt said. "Personally, it has allowed me to develop and foster relationships on a higher than normal level and to remain involved in a profession – the teaching of journalism – that I love."

**J**oy McCaleb worked on the Herald-Citizen in Cookeville, Tenn., for 10 years before she became a teacher. She was the newspaper, literary magazine and broadcast news adviser at Upperman High School for more than 20 years. One of her mentees is Renee Craig, the current Upperman High School newspaper adviser.

"My life has come full circle," McCaleb said. "I hope to be an advocate for journalism teachers but also be a voice of the press to our young future journalists."

The Mentor Program also accepts college teachers with middle school or high school experience as mentor candidates.



“THE MENTORING PROGRAM SUPPORTS OUR NEW TEACHERS IN KANSAS BY PROVIDING EXPERT TEACHING AND PUBLICATION ADVICE. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A VETERAN TEACHER WHO PROVIDES ONE-ON-ONE COACHING. OUR NEW TEACHERS LOVE THE PROGRAM AND CREDIT IT WITH KEEPING THEM IN THE PROFESSION AND GROWING THEM INTO AWARD-WINNING ADVISERS.”

~ ERIC THOMAS, KANSAS SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSN., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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