



## Mentoring for Pre-University Principals

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**Abstract:** Naming school principals with a delegation, a situation very often seen in some counties, leads, in terms of school management, to instability and a so-called temporary situation. I believe that the current situation can be significantly improved if a mentoring program for pre-university principals is introduced into the system, in order to increase quality and performance.

**Keywords:** mentoring; principals; education

### 1. Research Method

Regarding the field of mentoring in Romania and the way in which the transition from a teaching career to the one of a school unit principal is made, demonstrates that the current system is not productive, because most people aiming for a principal position are prepared for a teaching career and do not have the necessary training and abilities to become the manager of a school unit. The initial training system for pre-university principals includes a master's degree in educational management. However, not many principals have completed this form of education, which is largely theoretical. The contribution of the managerial training through classes accredited by the MECS is not exactly known, because there are not enough studies concerning the schools' management in Romania.

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The model is intended to cover the information gap regarding the issue of initial and continuing training of school principals and to provide a way for the professional development of directors to be assisted by mentoring programs, facilitating the direct transfer of knowledge, skills and abilities from long-experienced school principals to the newly named ones.

The purpose of the mentoring “model” is to implement a system of counseling and support for newly named directors.

The objectives of the mentoring “model” are the following:

1. To identify experienced directors willing to enter the mentor training program.
2. To identify the training needs of experienced directors willing to enter the mentor training program.
3. To create a council of experienced directors to provide advice and support for newly named directors.

**Expectations from the mentoring “model”:**

To be a support element for the professionalization of school principals;

To reduce the stress to which new principals are exposed to, which results in conflicts that are detrimental to the school climate;

To reduce conflicts in schools;

To improve the climate in schools and to increase the satisfaction of teachers.

To increase the professional performance of the teaching staff.

**2. The Structure and Implementation of the Mentoring “Model”**

The project of the mentoring “model” for school principals can run for 12 months (one school year). The program will run for four weeks and will provide the new school principals access to basic knowledge of management, coaching, mentoring, networking, research, and group problem solving. The new directors, who will volunteer, will join experienced directors, who in turn will volunteer as mentors and will also undergo a period of training.

The program leaders, who will consult with the new directors and consider their preferences, are the ones who will choose the mentor. The mentoring process will take approximately one year (one school year) and will culminate in a work

schedule established by the mentor and the principal, meetings, telephone conversations, and occasional school visits. The roles played by mentors will be: assisting new directors in solving problems, support person / counselor and pathfinder to people or resources.

The procedures for providing support for effective selection and engagement of participants will be incorporated into the program from the beginning. The mentors will be selected from a national register based on clear criteria and the agreed work protocols will be developed in order to guide mentoring activities. The fit between the mentor and the new director has been highlighted in numerous studies as the deciding factor for a successful mentoring process. The mentors and the new principals will be geographically close and will have similar interests and learning styles. The mentors will be trained in adult development and will be prepared for a possible extension of the relationship. A part of the training of mentors will take place in the presence of the new directors. The new directors will be prepared to get involved in the mentoring process, they will receive a handbook detailing the activities they will be involved in and the responsibilities of the mentors and the new directors. Both mentors and new directors will receive the same information about the process and the program. While some authors of training courses urge mentors not to provide solutions to the problems of new directors, mentors should be prepared to respond to requests for advice on practical issues.

The mentoring program should gradually progress in line with the personal development and increase of the new director's competence. Mentors will only be responsible for one director at a time because of time and emotional demands. The mentor will visit the school of the principal / workplace at the beginning of the process and will have the initiative in maintaining contact with the principal; both should be given two consecutive days to start the relationship. There will be structured working meetings regularly. These meetings could take place every month, at least at the beginning of the new director's activity. Information technology (e-mail, discussion forums and video conferencing) will be used extensively.

Recently retired directors can be good mentors and can be introduced in the program, provided they are kept up to date with the latest training classes. One of the main factors undermining the mentoring process is the risk of over-reliance on the mentor and in order to avoid it, both mentors and managers will be offered strategies to help them avoid such situations.

Mentors will be helped to become flexible - ready to provide guidance, if needed, on specific issues - and at the same time encourage the partner to make the right decisions. The new directors will do a needs analysis / needs assessment, so that the mentoring can be adapted to their individual needs. The mentoring program will combine individual and group work meetings where, for example, the mentor-director pair will be able to meet other pairs in small groups. The mentoring program will be formalized, the mentor and the director will sign a one-year contract to engage in the process and will have to agree on a development plan for the director and work together to develop an agenda. There will also be a written record of the mentoring process. The provision of mentoring and providers will be subject to monitoring and evaluation.

### **3. Results**

- Written report elaborated on the basis of the analysis of the current situation in the Romanian system and in advanced systems.
- A mentoring model for Romania.
- Mentoring training program for principals of pre-university education units.

### **4. Conclusions**

The current system of transitioning from a teaching career to the one of a school principal without specific training is not working, as most people who are looking for a principal position are prepared for a teaching career and do not have enough training regarding school management. The initial training system for pre-university principals includes a master's degree in educational management. However, not many principals have completed this form of education, which is largely theoretical.

The contribution of the managerial training through classes accredited by the MECS is not exactly known, because there are not enough studies concerning the schools' management in Romania. Naming school principals with a delegation, a situation very often seen in some counties, leads, in terms of school management, to instability and a so-called temporary situation. We believe that the current

situation can be significantly improved if a mentoring program for pre-university principals is introduced in the system.

### **Recommendations**

The realization of the technical documentation necessary for a normative act at MECS level, detailing an action plan for the introduction of a mentoring system for school principals; it is possible to attach this study as an argument of opportunity. Initiating a cycle of public debates in the education system in order to disseminate the idea of the need for a mentoring system for principals and to receive feedback in order to consolidate the legislative proposal for the establishment of that system. The elaboration of a curriculum for the training of mentors and of a system of evaluation of their abilities, that would capitalize on the conclusions of the present research, as well as the experience in this field of other educational systems. To develop a mentoring selection system based on a coherent set of criteria relevant to their role. The introduction in the educational system of a mentoring program for the principals of pre-university education units that will increase the quality and performance. The mentoring program will have to cover the information gap on the issue of initial and continuing training of directors and provide a way for the professional development of directors to be assisted by mentoring programs, facilitating the direct transfer of knowledge, skills and abilities from experienced directors to the newly named.

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