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**TITLE: Virtual Mentoring: Using the Web to Support Mentoring and Coaching**

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Mentoring is perhaps one of the most effective processes used for professional development. This approach facilitates the transfer, at a personal level, of proven knowledge, skills, and abilities that are directly applicable to a particular job. Mentors are experienced role models who can enhance the professional development of peers as well as aspiring or less-experienced individuals, using one-on-one coaching techniques. Mentoring is also one of the most resource-intensive learning approaches because it links individuals to one another. Nevertheless, online resources can facilitate the mentoring process. NASSP has launched an online Virtual Mentor Program to answer this need.

The purpose of the Virtual Mentor Program is to provide principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals with direct access to recognized school leader practitioners for advice, guidance, or ideas. The mentors are four MetLife/NASSP State Principals of the Year who have volunteered their time to share their knowledge and best practices with other middle level and high school leaders. The virtual mentors' pictures and brief biographies, as well as discussion boards, are available on the NASSP website. Users can ask questions or solicit information and guidance from one of the four mentors on the Ask a Mentor message board. Both the query and its response are available for everyone to review. Individuals who wish to participate in the online program can facilitate its success by posing questions that are:

- \* Relevant to the education profession and expertise of the mentors. Take a look at the mentors' brief background information and check out their schools' websites.
- \* Succinct, clear, and answerable within the context of the message board. Remember that the mentors are active school leaders and are volunteering their time, so please don't ask research-style questions that may require extensive responses.
- \* Not confidential. These are public message boards; try to keep the questions at an appropriate level.
- \* Not repetitive. Scan the previous questions and answers. The strength of the Virtual Mentor approach is that previous messages are available for everyone to learn from.

Although an online program cannot replicate all the benefits of a face-to-face program, using the Web to provide access to mentors for questions, comments, and advice can yield significant value:

Protégés will:

- \* Expand their knowledge of educational leadership skills and practices
- \* Develop broader perspectives on school leadership
- \* Associate with successful role models
- \* Learn about administrative and educational issues from respected practitioners.

Mentors will:

- \* Be recognized as successful leaders
- \* Increase their feelings of self-worth from contributing to education
- \* Reflect on their own skills, practices, and knowledge
- \* Stay current in the field
- \* Be exposed to fresh ideas.

Organizations will:

- \* Expand the knowledge base and skill level of potential and practicing principals
- \* Increase their leadership talent pool.

With the present principal shortage, it becomes imperative to fill positions with qualified and motivated individuals, not just warm bodies. The Virtual Mentor program is one of many tools available to help the growth of school leaders and increase interest in the profession. Go ahead and contact one of the four field practitioners (new mentors will be available each quarter), and ask them a question, request advice, or get their feedback on a concern. Networking just got easier.

## **WHAT DID YOU SAY?**

A Few Instructional Technology Buzz Words and Terms

**Daemon:** (Pronounced demon.) A software program that runs in the background on a computer and performs operations at predetermined times or in response to specific events. Windows calls daemons system agents. Typical daemon processes include file transfers, remote log-ins, and other administrative tasks.

**Streaming:** Playing video or sound in real time as it is downloaded over the Internet. A Web browser or plug-in decompresses and plays data as it is transferred to a user's computer. Streaming requires a powerful computer and fast connection because files are not stored on a user's computer.

**Webchat:** An online application that enables two or more logged-in users to set up a text-based, real-time, online conversation using the Internet.

**Zip:** A compressed archived file that allows faster transmission of large files across computer networks by enabling users to "package" or "zip-up" a file and send it to an addressed destination; the recipient then "unzips" the file.

**Zombie:** A computer that has been implanted with a daemon that puts it under the control of an unauthorized user without the computer owner's knowledge. Hackers use zombies to launch attacks, steal server space, or steal memory or processing power.

## **LOOKING AROUND**

### **Sites That May Deserve a Close Look**

Many computer hardware and software manufacturers provide significant discounts for the education community. In addition, their websites often provide useful tools and information regarding the use of technology in education. If you are considering purchasing new technology or updating current resources, it might be worth your time to check out some of these sites, such as Dell ([www.dell.com/us/en/k12](http://www.dell.com/us/en/k12)), Microsoft ([www.microsoft.com/education](http://www.microsoft.com/education)), IBM ([www-4.ibm.com/software/info/education](http://www-4.ibm.com/software/info/education)), Apple ([www.apple.com/education](http://www.apple.com/education)), and Macromedia ([www.macromedia.com/resources/education](http://www.macromedia.com/resources/education)).

## **ADDED MATERIAL**

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JESSE CHENG

## **WEB LINKS YOU CAN USE**

[www.educationnews.org](http://www.educationnews.org)

This site provides highlights of daily education news articles with links to the full articles and the originating sites. Visitors also have the option to subscribe to a newsletter that will e-mail the information and listings directly to their inboxes. The site also has an article archive and listing of links to other education-related sites.

<http://fdncenter.org>

The Foundation Center's mission is to support and improve institutional philanthropy by promoting public understanding of philanthropy and helping grant-seekers succeed. This site provides information and services related to U.S. philanthropy and can help users look for grants and prepare submissions.

[www.techlearning.com](http://www.techlearning.com)

This is the website for Technology & Learning magazine. In addition to providing access to current and archived articles, this site offers news and tips related to the use of technology in education and development.