

Case Study 1: Getting to Know Students - Setting the Conditions for Assets-Based Conversations

It's the beginning of the school year and mentors are getting to know their mentees. Equipped with tools for supporting beginning teachers in getting to know their students and planning for equitable outcomes, mentors engage in student-centered conversations with beginning teachers that encourage them to build student profiles right away. As teachers set up their initial curricular plans, mentors also encourage them to specifically plan for classroom engagement so that routines and expectations are clearly organized and communicated and a strong, positive classroom community is established.

Typical mentoring questions using these tools sounds something like this:

- *Who are the students in your classroom?*
- *What are the social, academic, cultural, and linguistic strengths of your students?*
- *What structures and systems might need to be in place so that your classroom runs smoothly and efficiently?*
- *What are your expectations for behavior in the classroom and how does this connect to your school's system for behavior?*
- *How will you clearly communicate expectations to students?*
- *What role might students play in designing classroom expectations?*
- *What are special learning needs for various populations in your classroom - ELL's and students with special education needs -- and how might you design classroom environments that are accessible for them?*
- *What do you know about your students' home lives? How do you plan to build strong partnerships with families?*

An example from the field:

Jacqueline is a non-traditional beginning teacher who comes to the classroom with former experience as a paraprofessional in different school settings. In beginning mentoring conversations, she is eager to identify English Language Learners and students with special education needs in her classroom as well as discuss ways to design her classroom instruction so that their various needs can be met. Together with her mentor, she completes the [WIDA Can Do Name Charts](#) for her English Language Learners and reviews students' IEP summaries to get a sense of the range of students'

abilities in her classroom. She meets her team's Bilingual Resource Teacher and the Special Educator assigned to work with students in her regular education classroom and they make a plan for service delivery for their shared students.

Quickly into the school year, she begins to struggle with classroom management and keeping students engaged in their learning due to multiple outbursts and off-task behavior. In mentoring conversations she confesses that she notices herself beginning to act like the kind of punitive teacher she never wanted to be. Through reflection and goal-setting, whereby she describes to the mentor the kind of responsive teacher she envisions herself becoming, she realizes that she could improve the quality of her Morning Meeting to specifically teach positive behaviors she expects to see throughout the day. In mentoring conversations, she identifies transitions back to the classroom from students' "specials classes," as the most challenging time of day, behaviorally, for students. Together with her mentor, she adjusts her [Student Engagement Plan](#) to address this need, as well as seeks out external support in implementing a restorative circle and meditative breathing practices into her daily routine.

She also realizes that there is a connection between students' off-task behavior and their struggling to understand and access core instruction. Through mentor observations focused on understanding and applying various [culturally and linguistically-responsive instructional strategies](#), she experiments with various formative assessment and engagement strategies. This helps her develop flexible approaches to engaging students in their learning and checking for understanding before releasing students to independent work.