Best Practices for Mentors

On-site mentors have a significant influence on student success in online courses. They are employed by the district and serve as liaison between the student, online instructor, parents and school staff. The Michigan Pupil Accounting Manual describes the mentor requirements for online learners. For students taking courses under Section 21f, language in 5-0-D applies: "An on-site mentor employed by the district must also be assigned to the pupil."

What does a mentor do?
- Serve as the local "eyes and ears" for the online instructor
- Track student progress in online courses
- Communicate with the online instructor, school administration and parents
- Address any concerns to staff and the online course provider
- Assign final grade to student after the percentile score is submitted by the online provider
- Help student stay on track and successfully progress through coursework

How does a mentor prepare to mentor?
- Participate in mentor training if available.
- Review syllabi for online courses students will be taking and become acquainted with prerequisites, assessment timetable, the Learning Management System used by the provider, technology requirements and enrollment information.
- Know where the student will be working – at school or at home.

How does a mentor help prepare a student for online learning?
- Determine what the technology requirements are for the course.
- Verify that the student or school can meet those requirements.
- Review the Profile of a Successful Student on page 3 of the Parent Guide to Online Learning.
- Review the results of the Readiness Rubric.
- Orient the student to what learning online requires of him/her.

Mentors have a significant impact on student success in online courses. Support includes
- Providing a place for the student to log into his/her course when at school.
- Arranging access to the technology the school provides.
- Monitoring that the student has logged into his/her class regularly.
- Reviewing progress and teacher comments in the grade book regularly.
- Helping student set goals to keep current.
- Helping students develop clear messages to communicate questions to their instructor.
- Securing assistance immediately from the online course provider should the student experience any technical difficulties.

Questions a mentor may need to answer:
- How do students receive their grade?
- Who is the course provider contact person if there are questions or issues outside the instructor's responsibility?
- What are the withdrawal policies for the course?
- How does the student submit assignments?
- What are the beginning and end dates of the course?
- What is the expectation for student/instructor communication and interaction?

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