



## **SPONSOR TEACHERS:** **Building a legacy for the next generation of teachers**

### **Why be a sponsor teacher?**

Recent graduates of BC teacher education programs reported the practicum as the most important part of their teacher education program. Sponsor teachers and other school teaching staff provide practicum support and are seen as positive role models.

Working with pre-service teachers provides the opportunity for a sponsor teacher to reflect on one's own practice, to discuss emerging and established educational theories, to model effective teaching strategies, and to become a mentor and guide.



### **Incentives and assistance for sponsor teachers**

Each of the universities provides orientation sessions for teachers interested in taking on the demanding role and responsibilities of sponsor teaching. Each institution publishes a handbook that details the expectations for each of the partners in the practicum. The universities also provide a number of incentives for sponsor teachers. These may include access to specialized computer labs and other university resources, free Internet access, team-teaching opportunities with faculty, and tuition credits.



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### **Important role of sponsor teachers**

The BCTF believes in the importance of sponsor teachers and that teachers have a responsibility to assist, on a voluntary basis, with teacher-education programs. The ability of successful sponsor teachers to model good teaching practices, the recognition of the specialized skills required for working with student teachers, and the importance of providing time for the partnership to develop are all outlined in Section 47 of the *Members' Guide*, specifically 47.A.04.

### **Communication and expectations**

An atmosphere of open communication between sponsor teacher and student teacher is important in building a respectful and collegial climate. It is also important that all parties, including the faculty advisors, have clear and specific expectations that are shared with each other before the practicum begins.

### **Code of Ethics**

The BCTF Code of Ethics sets the standard for professional conduct for teachers. Although student teachers are not full-fledged members of the profession, the principles of the Code of Ethics are significant guideposts for student teachers as well as for sponsor teachers and faculty advisors.

Key elements are found in Clauses 1, 3, and 5 of the Code of Ethics. Clauses 1 and 3 address the relationship of teacher to students, while Clause 5 addresses relationships with colleagues. It states that any criticism of a colleague's teaching performance and related work be directed to that colleague in private. This clause is central to a positive working relationship in our schools. Section 31 of the *Members' Guide* elaborates on the Code of Ethics and includes guides to professional practice.

### **Evaluation/reporting/feedback**

Sponsor teachers act as both mentors and evaluators as part of their professional responsibility in working with student teachers. Most of the feedback about performance is informal, non-evaluative comment that is part of the daily discussion that goes on during co-planning and reflection. Written reports required at various stages of the practicum are discussed by all the parties. The universities set clear expectations about what should be included in the written reports.

### **Confidentiality**

Any discussion or reporting that evaluates the performance of a student teacher should of course be done in confidence. It should involve only the

student teacher, the sponsor teacher, and the faculty advisor, unless other arrangements have been made with the agreement of all the parties.

### **Relationships**

The relationship between student teacher and sponsor teacher is one of trust, in which the sponsor teacher acts as a mentor but also has an evaluative role. That evaluative component may result in an unequal power relationship between student teacher and sponsor teacher. Sponsor teachers always need to be cognizant of this in their conduct toward student teachers.

### **Issues, concerns, and problem-solving processes**

At times during a practicum, some questions or concerns may arise among student teacher, sponsor teacher, and faculty advisor. Usually, these can be resolved through open communication among the parties. On rare occasions, other processes may be required to facilitate problem-solving.

The most effective way of addressing a dispute between a student teacher and a sponsor teacher is direct communication. Sometimes clarification of views and expectations is all that is needed.

If it appears that an issue cannot be settled between the student teacher and the sponsor teacher, then the faculty advisor should be involved. Each university has its own procedures for involving more senior faculty officials in a troublesome matter, so the parties at the school level should rely on such procedures, if they themselves cannot resolve the matter.

Here are some of the typical areas in which concerns or problems may arise.

- **Teaching assignment/workload issues**

Differences of opinion may arise regarding the nature of the assignment and how much a student teacher should teach during a practicum.

The universities in consultation with the BCTF Teacher Education Committee and the BC College of Teachers have established guidelines that included gradual immersion and a somewhat limited assignment. These guidelines should be followed.

- **Differences in philosophies or approaches to teaching**

Different views may exist about the nature of teaching and learning. These views need to be discussed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Teachers have arrived at ways of doing things that work for them; whereas student teachers are exposed to and are expected to explore

various approaches in order to find their own “comfort zone” in the classroom. Student teachers need opportunities to explore a variety of approaches.

- **Matching student teachers and sponsor teachers**

As much as possible, attempts should be made to match students and sponsor teachers in ways that bring together people who have common interests and expectations.

- **Sponsor teaching: A rewarding experience for all**

The vast majority of experiences are positive. Sponsor teachers perceive the experience to be an opportunity for enjoyment and professional growth for themselves.

*“I think it’s a wonderful chance to be able to have somebody, another pair of eyes in the room, to get another person’s perspective. I’ve always learned something from the student teachers.”*

*“It’s fun; it’s wonderful. I think the kids benefit.”*

*“I’ve often found that that’s a very rewarding experience for me and my students. I learn from the student teacher and I consider that to be a good experience...”*

The BCTF certainly thanks you for playing a significant role in the induction of teachers into the teaching profession.

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**For further information**

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