Competency 004:

-The entry-level principal knows how to monitor and assess classroom instruction to promote teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

-I have served as an official mentor teacher for the last 4 years on my campus. During this time I have also been an un-official mentor for many first-year teachers as they learn the ropes of the profession. During the 19-20 school year, I was able to take the lead on our campus New Teacher Academy. As the head of the NTA, I worked with our new teachers as a 24/7 resource to improve their instruction based off any questions they had, or what I may have seen while observing their classroom.

-With several of these teachers, I took their feedback from district or alternative certification spot observations and gave them specific feedback in order to better their classroom practices. (see Competency 4 artifact). Through this method, we were able to see growth from observation to observation.

Action Research Project – Growth of New Teachers

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Background:

Depending on what publication you are reading, the new teacher burnout rate falls somewhere between 19% and 31% according to a study by the Learning Policy Institute. Other publications have that number much higher! While there is not one specific reason for this high rate of attrition, an article by Bryan Goodwin in *Educational Leadership* attributes much of this to three factors. Those three reasons are; struggles with classroom management, being burdened by curricular freedom, and working in unsupported environments.

Providing support for new teachers should be a high priority for all campuses. In *Lifelines to the Classroom: Designing Support for Beginning Teachers*, Stansbury and Zimmerman explore low-intensity and high-intensity supports for new teachers. They say, "Less intensive support strategies have been found effective at increasing retention and promoting personal and professional well-being, but the more intensive strategies are more effective at improving beginning teaching practice." (pg. 14). Several of the low intensity strategies include an orientation, matching new teachers with veteran teachers as mentors, and adjusting working conditions to be more favorable. High-intensity strategies would be seen as training effective support providers, providing release time, and mini-courses to address challenges.

According to Eric Jensen in *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, new teachers often start with less than desirable circumstances. That can include the classroom itself. Their classroom may be in the noisier area of the school. It may have less than adequate lighting or space, and it may be the furthest from resources (ex. Portable buildings). In addition to that, Jensen says that new teachers are often given the most difficult assignments, whether that be their rosters, or multiple class preps with little to no assistance.

As the head of our New Teacher Academy on my campus, I wanted to delve more deeply into the high-intensity strategies, as I felt that we've done a more than sufficient job of the low-intensity strategies. My main focus in supporting new teachers was to offer the opportunity for them to see other classrooms, have their classroom be observed and given in the moment feedback, as well as looking at previous observation reports and focusing on specific areas of improvement.

In his article *Seven Keys to Effective Feedback*, Grant Wiggens writes of the importance of timely feedback. Wiggens states that feedback should be given to where the learner can make adjustments to their methods, without having to wait days or weeks to receive the feedback. In addition to the timeliness, Wiggens also speaks of the importance of actionable feedback. Actionable feedback should be given in a descriptive manner, that leads no room for interpretation on either side of the conversation. Wiggens states that many feedback sessions lead to arguments because the feedback givers are not specifically descriptive.

School Profile:

Robert T. Hill Middle School had a 2018-2019 enrollment of 852 (my data portal) spread amongst three grades. The RTH attendance zone stretches from the east side of White Rock Lake to Interstate 635 in the west. Everything south of Loop 12 down to Garland Rd. This includes the Old Lake Highlands, Lochwood, Casa View, and parts of the far East Dallas neighborhoods. The Hispanic population of students is slightly larger than the district at 76.5%. The African American population is smaller at 13%. The Asian population is slightly larger than DISD as a whole with 3.3%. The economically disadvantaged students are much larger than the district average at 88%. The English Learners are higher as well at 54%. TAG and SPED numbers align with the district averages.

According to the 2017-2018 TEA TAPR report there were 76 members of the staff. Over 50% of teachers had less than 5 years of classroom experience, while 34% had more than 10 years of experience. 32% of teachers are African American, 14% Hispanic, 49% White. The current school year breakdown of administration has one Principal, with 3 Assistant Principals, and 3 counselors (one per grade). There are 4 Instructional Lead Teachers (1 math, 1 science, 2 English/Language Arts).

Statement of the Problem:

Over 6 years on the Robert T. Hill campus I have seen many new teachers come into the profession with a head full of steam, ready to make a change and have a positive impact on our learners. Some of these teachers have been wildly successful, while others are soon searching for different schools, or altogether different professions after only a year or two. This problem is not unique to our campus, as it is mirrored throughout the United States.

During my first year of teaching, I was a member of the New Teacher Academy (NTA) that was led by the principal. I came in without any classroom experience (outside of being a substitute) but had a lot of experience working with students aged 6-16 through my work as a director at a children's camp. The NTA met monthly, before school, and offered lessons about various facets of the job that are important for first year teachers. In the years following that several other staff members attempted to take the lead of NTA, but without much success. First year teachers became frustrated with lack of support, or consistency of support.

Before the 2019-2020 school year, I met with several second-year teachers on our campus in order to assess and reflect on the New Teacher Academy from the previous year. It was evident that these teachers had not been given adequate amounts of feedback pertaining to

their instructional delivery, classroom management, nor lesson planning, regardless of if they had been trained in a traditional teacher program or an alternative one.

Proceeding with the NTA for the 2019-2020 school year, I saw that providing feedback to teachers would be just as important as lessons on procedures or resources available to them. The idea behind the NTA is to offer support for every aspect of a teacher's job: planning and delivering content, setting up procedures/routines, as well as minding one's social and emotional well-being.

Moving into the action research project, the opportunity arose to offer feedback on teacher observations from their campus appraiser or their alternative certification appraiser. This added dimension to the NTA will provide yet another layer of support for new teachers in the areas that their appraisers deemed their skills lacking during the observation process. Being able to look at observations from before and after feedback meetings with the teachers will make it clearly evident if the action project is successful.

Plan Design:

As previously stated, my goal for my action research assignment was to give teachers specific feedback based off of previous observations. By meeting with the teachers and looking over observations with them, an area of growth was specified and ways of making improvement were specified. The idea behind only choosing one area of improvement comes from *Get Better Faster* where one of Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's principles of coaching is to "Go Granular". Bambrick states that the key to dramatic, lasting growth is just practicing one to two skills at a time.

Once we have chosen the growth area, teachers were given small actionable steps that could help them in the area in which they were lacking. These steps were taken from Bambrick's

"Scope and Sequence" from *Get Better Faster*, or I gave teachers methods that I have learned during my teaching experience. The value in basing these action steps off of observations is two-fold. First, selfishly, by looking for improvement in scores I can see if the action research plan is working. Secondly, and most importantly, if the teachers can see the improvement from one observation to another, they gain confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Below is the framework for my action project. If the action project had started at the beginning of the year, we would have been able to repeat the last two steps of this cycle multiple times. With the unexpected school closures, and not starting the project until late January, we were only able to complete the steps once.
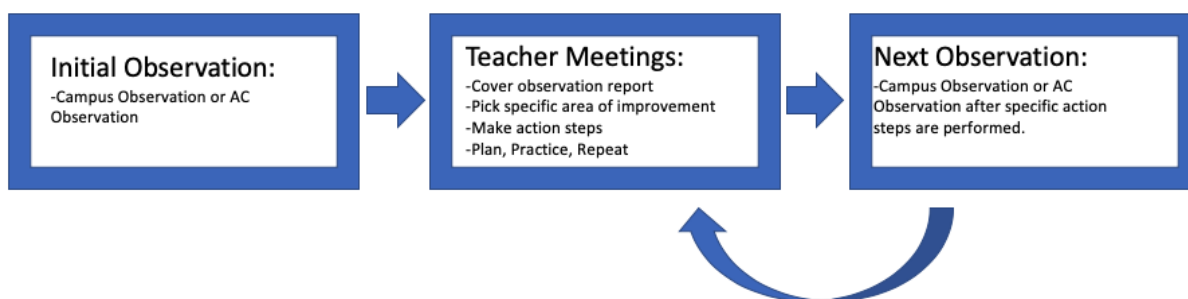
The NTA consisted of 17 first year teachers. I constantly checked in and followed up with all of the teachers throughout the year. However, with my responsibilities as a teacher, grad student, and baseball coach conducting my action project with all 17 was not feasible. I chose 5 teachers to work with. These 5 teachers were all getting their alternative certification through Texas Teachers, and our schedules allowed us time to meet during the day (as well as after school some days). I also was able to build a relationship with the representative from Texas Teachers, and we met several times as he was on campus.

With all of the teachers, with the exception of one (Teacher 4), we used the Field Base Experience observations from Texas Teachers as the way to find areas of improvement. We also

used this form to see growth. With Teacher 4, we used the Dallas ISD 2019-2020 Spot Observation scores.

<div align="center">Results:</div>

As with everything in 2020, the Corona Virus had an adverse effect on my project. We were able to complete the framework one time per teacher, and loop back around to a second teacher meeting (some via zoom, some in person before school closures).

Teacher 1 is a special education inclusion, and resource teacher. We looked at observations from 10/15, 11/13, and 1/8. The observations took place during her Math Resource class. In each of these observations she was rated as "Developing" in the "Monitor and Adjust" category from the Texas Teachers rubric. The feedback she received is that she needs to improve in her check ins with the students during their work. Aggressive monitoring has been a district wide push this year, but many teachers have had a hard time implementing it. With this teacher we practiced the basics of AGMO. I explained the campus coding system, how to create her student roster, and how to effectively combine the two. Teacher 1 was able to see how with her AGMO roster and thh coding, she easily knew who to pull for a small group, or if she needed to modify it for her students. In the next observation, Teacher 1 moved from "Developing" to "Accomplished" in the "Monitor and Adjust" category.

Teacher 2 is a 6th grade Social Studies teacher. I have worked the most throughout the year with Teacher 2 because she is in the classroom next to mine and is always looking for ways to improve. I have been able to see very clear growth from her, as she's a perfectionist and is always adjusting her methods for the better. In her observations from 11/13, and 1/8 she was rated as "Developing" in the "Managing Student Behavior". In our meeting she stated that students talking during a lesson is her biggest management issue. The observation report

confirmed that, but also stated that less than half of the class was compliant at the beginning. The feedback that we worked on was an in the moment reset of Bambrick's *Get Better Faster*. In addition to that, I shared with her that she should not engage with the scholars who are talking during a lesson. If there is talking, she should stop, acknowledge why she is not continuing, and not start until the classroom is in compliance. The feedback from Teacher 2 on this method was immediate. She reported that her students began to self-police and her classroom was much more compliant. The in the moment reset was helpful as well because it led to students helping to manage the classroom. In her next observation (3/4) from Texas Teachers, she moved from "Developing", to "Accomplished".

Teacher 3 is a English Language Arts inclusion teacher. Due to family circumstances his attendance had been spotty during the school year. We looked at observations from 9/23 and 10/15. The feedback from his Texas Teachers observation was rated as "developing" in the "Knowledge of Students" category. After meeting with Teacher 3, I realized that during those first observations he was overwhelmed with the movement from classroom to classroom and supporting multiple teachers. My feedback to him was that he needed to explore the classroom dynamic between himself and each of the classroom teachers that he supports. He also needed to assert himself during the class period with the students. We talked about what that looked like, and actually met with one of the ELAR teachers that he shares the classroom with and worked through what a class period of inclusion should look like in her class. On Teacher 3's 3/4 observation from Texas Teachers, he moved from "developing" to "proficient". Not quite the jump I would have liked to see a jump to "Accomplished", but any improvement is welcome.

Teacher 4 is the dance teacher at our school. I have no experience whatsoever in her content, but her biggest issues were from the 3.1 (Procedures & Systems), and 3.2 (Behavior

Expectations) of the Dallas ISD TEI rubric. In both of those, she had been rated as a 1 (progressing). The feedback she received was that she had students acting out and had students who weren't involved. In our meeting, she ran through what this behavior looks like in her class. She stated that behavior stemmed from students who were choosing not to participate, and if they didn't want to dance that she didn't have anything else to do with him. We then created jobs for those students, they were in charge of taking attendance at the beginning of the class, and in charge of making sure that the spacing was correct during dance routines. Teacher 4 said that there was direct improvement after installing this system. I was not able to get another observation report from Teacher 4 due to the school closure, but the feedback seemed to work tremendously.

Teacher 5 is a sixth grade English/Language Arts teacher. She is another whose classroom is in close proximity to mine, which leads to the opportunity for many discussions. This teacher has some previous experience teaching overseas, being her first-year teaching in the US, she is working on her certification through Texas Teachers. Her observation scores started out and remained higher than the other new teachers. In observations from 10/24 and 1/15 she was rated at "proficient" in "Data & Assessment". In conversations with her AC evaluator, he stated that the biggest room for improvement for Teacher 5 is her ability to build deeper thinking through questioning with her students, and allowing students time to explain answers, or guiding them out of a wrong answer into the right one. He suggested an article from the Teaching Channel that gives several question stems, and methods for teachers to use with students. She and I also looked over a book that discusses Marzano's instructional strategies. We specifically looked at follow up questions with students and practiced how we might follow up with a student who may be very close to a correct answer. We also looked at strategies on how to guide a

student who is nowhere close to the right answer. In an observation from 3/13 she was again rated as "proficient". While I would have liked to see her move to "accomplished", that gives us an opportunity to dig deeper into questioning methods.

<div align="center">Reflections/Longevity:</div>

Overall, I am pleased with the outcome of this action research project. The goal at the beginning was to offer useful feedback to first year teachers. This is something that previous beginning teachers have felt was lacking on our campus. While I was only able to have these conversations with about ⅓ of our new teacher population, based on the feedback I've gotten from these 6 teachers, and the difference in their observation scores before and after there was some impact. I also realize that teachers will grow throughout the year, and with some of the starting observations being from the first semester, there should be that growth there even without my input.

In order to feel more confident about the success of my action research project, I would have liked to have more time to devote to it. I felt like many of my meetings with the new teachers were rushed. Trying to fit everything into the schedules of already very busy teachers was difficult. Between still being a classroom teacher, having a complete new team to work with, after school tutoring, and coaching commitments time was at a premium. While we had set times to meet, many of our conversations were in 5-minute spurts.

I feel that having an extra resource that has no bearing on their observation scores was a great comfort for these teachers. We were able to have candid conversations, and we were able to relate at a very deep level since it was a teacher to teacher relationship. That being said, if this was going to become a part of the NTA, there should be more teachers leading the NTA. We do have a mentor program with the district, but it has never been run effectively on our campus.

Many mentor teachers don't find out they've been assigned to be a mentor until late or until there is a deadline. If the mentor/mentee program was better run, I believe that the method of growing new teachers through their observation scores could be very successful!

I also realize that you can ask too much out of teachers who already have busy schedules. If the program started at the beginning of the year and those mentor teachers had time in their schedule already devoted to the meeting and observation feedback loop, it could have a profound impact on observation scores. More importantly though, it would allow those new teachers to feel supported, and build a sense of trust and community within the staff at a school.

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