



MENTORS OBSERVE SERIOUS CHALLENGES FOR NEW ADVISERS

by *Bill Flechtner, MJE*

Too many responsibilities and expectations.
Little or no background in media they advise.
Strong push for public relations reporting.
Movement of programs to after-school clubs.

These are some of the more serious trends and issues new advisers are facing, according to their JEA mentors. And each reflect the changing state of scholastic journalism in recent years.

“I have been amazed by the changes in advising since I left teaching 3 and 1/2 years ago and began mentoring,” Colorado mentor Sheila Jones said. “For inexperienced advisers, the thought of all these expectations is overwhelming.”

Mentors repeatedly mention the lack of time that mentees have to devote to the mentoring program. As a result, getting responses from mentees can be a slow, patient process.

As new teachers, many mentees “are extremely underpaid, constantly dodging bullets from the legislature, financing their own classrooms, etc., so I get it,” North Carolina mentor Carol Eanes said.

Additional Responsibilities

Mentees are overwhelmed with many responsibilities and expectations. Some new advisers are asked to moderate clubs and be involved in extracurricular activities, many of which are unpaid but all take from time to build their programs. And new expectations to demonstrate professional growth add more work.

“Teachers (have) to spend lots of time completing paperwork and meeting districts’ mandates for documentation of their effectiveness,” Jones said.

With the move to online news sites, mentors report that the “always on” factor of staff organization, increased technology training and concerns and managing multiple online presences is taking a toll on new advisers.

“When Tim Harrower told a room of 35 advisers in Colorado to pick one thing and focus on it the most, you could hear the collective sigh of relief in the room,” Jones said. “Yet, several commented that their administrators expected them to do it all and did not understand why this was so demanding.”

Some mentors are finding that new advisers’ focus tends to be more on creating a product (yearbook, newspaper, uploading web content, etc.) than focusing on journalism basics. And some new advisers come to media programs with little or no background and see advising as only a stepping-stone to a more stable position.

“(Advisers) are swamped with new paperwork/assessment demands, and all these things seem to have diminished their feelings about their careers. I’ve heard this from several advisers in the past few years,” Wisconsin mentor Dave Wallner said.

Need for Journalism Education

Since new advisers may not have much background or train-



“I think the hardest part for me has been coaching editors through struggles instead of sitting down at a computer and making changes myself or taking over a staff meeting when they’re in charge,” said first year adviser Lindsay Skatrud. She works with her after-school staff on the newspaper, the Spartan Banner, at Brookfield East High School in Wisconsin.

Photo by Linda Barrington

ing in media, mentors fill the gap in their mentee’s knowledge.

Illinois mentor Stan Zoller said that he spends most of his time mentoring by helping with “planning, recruiting, staff issues (and) handling sensitive topics.”

There is a lack of knowledge about press law and ethics, including copyright laws and the use of the Internet.

“Using the JEA curriculum in lieu of texts they don’t have and being so very grateful for having it as a source has helped,” Illinois mentor Carol Smith said.

And mentors report that they are spending more time in classrooms working with students and guiding their mentees through helping to plan units of instruction and teaching lessons.

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Oregon mentor Bill Flechtner works with students in Jennifer Young's publications class at President Theodore Roosevelt High School in Honolulu, Hawai'i. They were brainstorming new topics for the upcoming paper and how best to cover them. This semester they also completed a project on the First Amendment. Jennifer used the JEA curriculum to develop the unit.

Photo by Jennifer Young

"I have created focused web quests on different topics and then email these out as bi-monthly or monthly 'goodie bags of tips and tricks,'" Jones said.

"I review each paper and give advice to advisers and students. I answer questions and concerns about particular stories, ethical issues and First Amendment issues," Wallner said.

Publication Content

Mentors are finding students more interested in technology, entertainment, fashion and giving opinions about national and world events than covering local school news.

"That is probably a trend that comes about because it is clear that school administrators are content with a sort of sound-bite list of what-this-club or class is doing and how the football team did," New Jersey mentor Ron Bonadonna said.

A mentee was told by the administration that they did not want anything "that would put the school in a negative light" and indicated that there would be problems if any negative stories were published.

Student Time Crunch

On a related issue, new advisers tell their mentors that they have continuing problems with students not having the time to devote to the programs.

"Students who have stepped forward to join programs are convinced they must 'spread themselves out' and bulk up their resume for college admissions. Once they join the program, their commitment is tempered by their involvement in this and that, so they miss attending work sessions," Bonadonna said.

This emphasis on bulking their college resumes can result in pressure from students on their adviser to have way too many editors, few of whom provide true leadership for their publication and most of whom fail to carry their weight, according to Wisconsin mentor Linda Barrington.

Professional Development

And funding continues to be problem. One mentee could not attend a state journalism day because all funds had to come from the mentee's program that would have left little to fund the rest of the year. Other mentors said that advisers have to pay for their own substitutes to attend conferences either from their own pocket or their program's funds.

"The major effect I see is that the teacher's professional growth and development in journalism-related things takes a back seat to the more pressing demands placed on them daily. They don't have the time to spend educating themselves," Jones said.

Other Trends

Another trend reported is the move to either combine all media classes into one course or to move the course to an after school club or online only.

"One concern I have seen with the move to online news sites is that though it saves money, it creates a variety of new challenges for the advisers," Jones said. "Administrators are increasingly unlikely to give their advisers time to learn and grow."

Mentors are helping mentees find grants to help fund their programs. Some mentees are getting CTE licensure for access to grant money. And mentors are helping mentees find ways to meet needs that might otherwise go unmet.

"I encourage mentees with small staffs to use submitted photos, to use a Twitter and Google docs to make advising easier and add spice to their publications — free and yet useful," Smith said.

Despite so many obstacles, new advisers are persevering and developing good programs and using the mentor program.

"Advisers have found that using the 'maestro' approach to planning and team structure is effective in time management, student training, and student accountability," Jones said.

"Advisers are engaging colleagues in getting recommendations, developing flyers for distribution that encourage students to consider the program," Bonadonna said.

Mentees "include their mentoring as part of their professional goal for the year, so time spent in the program helps them meet their documentation requirements," Jones said.

And mentors are finding satisfaction in what they are doing. "All my mentees are working hard to develop programs their districts can be proud of, and I am proud of them," Smith said.

"My role continues to be as a motivator who encourages them to fight the good fight, and to keep in mind why we teach — to help our students learn and grow and succeed," Wallner said.

MENTEES' COMMENTS: THIS IS WHAT HAVING A JEA MENTOR MEANS TO US



"Last summer I was asked to be the high school publications adviser, which meant taking over the newspaper and literary magazine programs. Having taught middle school English and literature for 10 years, I was excited for the change, but nervous because I had virtually no exposure to journalism. I applied for the mentorship with JEA and my mentor, Megan Fitzgerald, emailed me excited to help me out. Over the summer, we met in person and she shared some great ideas about how to actually produce a newspaper, from articles and leads to layouts and headlines. I also spent time poring over the

online curriculum that JEA provided on the website. I used many of the PowerPoints, quizzes and activities during the first few weeks at school, and the JEA curriculum was instrumental in helping me feel confident in the classroom. Over the last few months, Megan has been so resourceful. She has answered my frantic emails late at night about getting our first issue to the publisher and has given me feedback that I have been able to communicate to my students. I am proud to say that we have produced three of our quarterly issues, and the mentorship has been essential for helping our newspaper program get back on track."

Mariette Williams, American Heritage School of Boca Del Ray, Delray Beach, Florida



Dolores Reilly
Cherry Hill West High School
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

"I was so pleased when I quickly received a mentor after my initial request at the end of the summer. About to begin my first year teaching journalism, I was looking for ways to connect with those who could guide me down the best path. My mentor, Ron Bonadonna, has done that and more. Until I started working with Ron, I did not know how much there was to learn about teaching journalism and advising a school publication. He provided so much useful information that I never would have thought to ask for. This year, working with Ron has helped me establish myself as someone who can take our journalism program to the next level — a level I could not have envisioned without the wisdom and guidance of Ron's many years of experience."



Brian Banach
Desert Vista High School
Phoenix, Arizona

"The JEA mentoring program has been an invaluable resource for me as I've worked to develop the journalism program at my school over the last two years. My mentor, Carmen Wendt, has done a magnificent job of maintaining an open line of communication and offering help/guidance whenever I need it. She has regularly made herself available to me and offered advice on a variety of curriculum-related issues, ranging from classroom facilitation to fundraising opportunities. With her assistance, I've grown confident in my abilities to create and establish a solid program that I believe will continue to grow in the coming years."



Krystin Pinckard
Mountain Point High School
Phoenix, Arizona

"My mentor, Carmen Wendt, has helped me through the growing pains and wonderful opportunity of taking over journalism and yearbook. Carmen has been there for the music and candy fueled deadline nights. Bouncing recruitment ideas for Open House has been invaluable. When an executive editor moved, seven students dropped at semester and I lost my mind, Carmen was right by my side to navigate. The JEA Mentor Program has expanded my knowledge and friendships, and I am so grateful."



Tarsha Martin
Lamar High School
Lamar, South Carolina

"As I began the task of yearbook adviser, I had lots of questions, as well as great ideas but did not know how to execute them in the journalism world. I wanted my production to be flawless. Unfortunately, my first product (yearbook) was far from it. But thanks to the JEA Mentoring Program the following year, I was blessed with a mentor, Marilyn Chapman. She has been my mentor for the past three years. I am so happy to have her in my support system. She has been my soundboard. Her expertise in journalism is invaluable. She has navigated me through many obstacles I've faced, as well as making suggestions and observations that have made my life much easier. She has assisted my students with writing lessons, captioning and other aspects of telling 'our story.' I am so deeply grateful for the relationship and opportunity to work with Marilyn. She is truly a gem! Thanks, JEA Mentoring Program!"

URBAN, RURAL SCHOOLS FACE CHALLENGES OF STUDENT APATHY, POVERTY, LACK OF RESOURCES

Information and quotes for this story were gathered by Linda Barrington from mentees via email and their mentee profiles.

NUMBERS.

Garden City HS, Garden City, Kansas

75% minority population
63% on free or reduced lunch

Huntington HS, Shreveport, Louisiana

89.5% minority population
71% on free or reduced lunch

Enka HS, Candler, North Carolina

55% free or reduced lunch

Kearns HS, Kearns, Utah

47% minority population
60% on free or reduced lunch

Numbers only begin to tell the stories of mentees teaching in impoverished, diverse schools, both urban and rural. It is when they describe their challenges that their daily experiences give meaning to the numbers.

Kansas: ELL Students, Poverty

“I enjoy my position as a journalism educator, and I love the diversity of my students,” Jenny Hands said. She advises the yearbook and newspaper at Garden City High School in Kansas. With 42 students in yearbook and 36 in newspaper, she said, “It was quite crowded and challenging to manage all assignments and students.”

Her bigger challenge is her large population of English language learners. While teaching journalism skills, she needs to spend considerable time on vocabulary development, spelling, grammar, etc.

“Many ELL students choose journalism because they see it as an opportunity to continue to practice their English skills,” Hands said.

Keeping down the yearbook cost to make it affordable is another challenge. It is not unusual, she said, to get yearbook payment in quarters, dimes and dollar bills.

“The yearbook staff and I recognize the sacrifice it is for some families to purchase our product, so that motivates us to put our best effort into the yearbook,” Hands said. “Although our school has some challenges, our educational community is dedicated to providing a first-rate education for our students. We believe in meeting students where they are and pushing them to where they never thought they could be.”

Louisiana: Poverty, Lack of Resources

At Huntington High School in Shreveport, Kelsey Bagwell faces even more challenges. He started the year with 12 yearbook students, only to have the class dropped for low numbers. As an after-school program, only a half dozen signed on, with half of them dropping. More dropped as the year went on. The three remaining freshmen have no transportation to allow them to stay after school.

“Our biggest other obstacles,” Bagwell said, “are lack of equipment to work on the yearbook and newspaper, ridiculous deadlines from the publisher and an apathy or lack of funds from the students to purchase.”

None of the three computers worked at the start of the school year. Two were fixed, but they were slow and one would randomly power off. Students couldn’t work at home because the only Internet they had was on their phone.

“Finally in February we were given after-school access to the computer lab,” Bagwell said, “but the yearbook deadline was Feb. 29.” He solved that problem by switching publishers to get an April deadline. The bonus was that the price was more affordable and the new software was easier to use.

Excitement is in the air, he said. Part of what drives the staff is seeing him with them at most events taking photos together, along with his wife, a professional photographer.

“With that excitement, with having at least three returning staff, including my editor-in-chief, and a summer training kick-off, I have high hopes for next year,” Bagwell said. “I am hoping to get two to five computers as well as a couple of cameras and telephoto lenses for next year if my grant goes through. The good thing at this school is I have a very good administrative team that supports us any way they can.”

“THE MENTOR PROGRAM HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMMITTED TO SERVING JOURNALISM TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AT URBAN SCHOOLS WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS, AS WELL AS THOSE IN RURAL AREAS. THIS YEAR 34% OF OUR MENTEES TEACH IN THESE SCHOOLS.”

LINDA BARRINGTON, MENTOR PROGRAM CHAIR

MENTORS brainstorm solutions for mentees

The challenges faced by these schools, teachers and students aren’t going to be resolved in a snap. An experienced mentor, however, can provide support, ideas, resources and other assistance. The suggestions here come from many JEA mentors. Your mentor will have more ideas and can help you.

Lack of Resources

- Many journalism programs qualify for Perkins money under Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding.
- For a textbook resource, go to the publisher’s website and request a free examination copy.
- Ask your daily newspaper or an alumni for help.
- Convince administrators that journalism programs teach students viable, modern and necessary skills for the workplace, and that accreditation teams usually find that journalism programs demonstrate all the characteristics they look for.

Student Apathy

- Using team building activities, especially at the beginning of the year.
- Have students memorize the First Amendment and assign the Supreme Court free press cases to drive home the Amendment’s realities.
- Have students write five things they would like to change about their school, town, state or country and begin writing feature stories or producing documentaries.
- Working as teams with maestro projects helps get the staff involved with the class and each other.

Inadequate Technology

- Find out how the tech budget is being used and get money funneled to journalism.
- Write to the state press foundation for technology grants to buy cameras, monitors and software.
- Write a grant request through donorschoose.org for improved technology. (Public schools only.)
- Check Craig’s List for cameras, computers, etc.
- Join Tech Soup for non-profits to qualify for free software.

Lack of Funding

- Many journalism programs qualify for Perkins money under Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding.
- Identify all possible sources of funding within the school, e.g., Booster Club, Parent Teacher Organizations, vending machines, dances, concession stands, and pursue getting a slice of the pie.
- Lobby for the journalism program if it is not being funded fairly.
- Write for a grant from a local foundation.
- Sell ads, create journalism projects that will make money.

North Carolina: Lack of Technology at Home

Students at Enka High School in rural Candler lack access to technology at home, according to Joan Hoffman, the yearbook adviser.

“My best student, whom I would like to make an editor, has no access to a computer or Internet at home. I am thinking of buying her a computer myself,” Hoffman said. Without a big city’s transportation system, students can’t just go to places like a library to log on and work on the yearbook. Editors need time to review stories and plan layouts. That can’t all be done during class.

Hoffman has many immigrant students on staff and some are the most dedicated members of her classroom. But she has difficulty with them leaving for extended periods of time.

“When you have students leave for a month or two at a time to return to Mexico, the Ukraine, South America, etc. on practically no notice, it can be a real struggle to meet deadlines, adjust workloads and keep the staff happy,” Hoffman said.

She also sees a connection between the focus on standardized testing and the decline in writing and social skills over the years, which affects what she teaches in journalism as well as English class.

“Twelve years ago I wasn’t constantly explaining basic concepts of capitalization and proper nouns,” she said. “I don’t even get to things like passive voice with these students.”

Utah: Lack of Resources, Apathy

“I work at a very poor school and the money that I have for my program does not pay for what I need in order to make the program as successful as I would like it to be,” Kathryn Wilkins at Kearns High School said. She uses the copy machine to print the newspaper because there is not enough money for printing.

She was able to purchase a new camera this year and set up a SNO website, but the rest of her budget was spent on paper, ink and events for her program.

“I have a very supportive principal, but I am lacking close to \$5,000 to run the program,” Wilkins said.

Her other big challenge is apathetic students who tend to be uninterested in the news even if it has to do with their own school. There’s a little interest, she said, if they or their friends are mentioned in a story.

“I have some students who take the class to fill the credits they need,” Wilkins said. “I have been able to find some diamonds in the rough that way, but if a student is not interested in writing, it makes it difficult for them to enjoy the class or really put a lot of effort into the article they’re writing.”

Wilkins wants her students’ work to “shine some light on the very positive things happening at school, but the perception has not really changed for the most part.”

Her next step is to get parents and the community more involved in what they are doing in her program, but she needs resources to do that.

JOINING THE MENTOR PROGRAM

If you want to become a mentor, START HERE

Do you meet the requirements?

- Outstanding, knowledgeable journalism adviser (HS or MS) who is retired or soon to be retired
- College adviser with HS or MS experience
- Good health/ability to travel to schools and conventions
- Available for training at the JEA Advisers' Institute in July
- JEA certified or can become one within the first year as a mentor

YES

Contact your state scholastic press association (SPA) to see if it is already part of the Mentor Program.

YES

Let the president or director know you are interested. The association will let you know if it can afford to support an additional mentor and will examine your qualification to determine if you will meet the needs in your state.

NO

Let the president or director know you are interested. Ask if your SPA is willing to join and ask them to contact the Mentor chair: mentoring@jea.org. Program information can be found at mentoring.jea.org under the Program Docs tab.

If you have no state scholastic press association, contact the Mentor chair directly: mentoring@jea.org. Funding is available for one mentor in your state.

If your state wants to join the Mentor Program, START HERE

- Learn about the Mentor Program at mentoring.jea.org. Download program documents under the Program Docs tab.
- Contact the Mentor Program chair at mentoring@jea.org to ask questions and get more information.

Your state scholastic press association needs to decide how to provide funding for mentor stipend(s) based on how many mentors it will start with.

Complete the Memorandum of Understanding and send to Kelly Furnas, JEA executive director, at furnas@jea.org.

State scholastic press association begins search for potential mentors who need to be available for training in July at the JEA Summer Advisers' Institute. Deadline is June 1. Notify Mentor chair as soon as possible.

The relationship between the JEA Mentor program and the state association is spelled out in the program documents and the yearly Memorandum of Understanding.

JEA owns and operates the Mentor Program.

- JEA funds and provides initial mentor training as well as yearly professional development for mentors at national conventions.
- JEA sets the program guidelines, stipend payments and program documents.
- JEA works with SPAs, using a yearly Memorandum of Understanding that outlines financial and operational structures.
- JEA owns the training materials through an agreement with the New Teacher Center.
- JEA provides SPAs the ability to apply for stipend support through its grant from the Yellow Chair Foundation.
- JEA provides free membership for mentors and mentees.
- JEA requires twice a year reporting from the mentors.
- JEA provides program information through its brochure, newsletter and website (mentoring.jea.org).

The state scholastic press association partners with JEA in the operation of the Mentor Program within its state.

- The SPA selects its mentors.
- The SPA provides stipends for its mentors through its budget, grants and/or other funding.
- The SPA provides benefits for the mentors and/or mentees, like free or reduced SPA membership.
- The SPA helps mentors find mentees.
- The SPA signs the yearly Memorandum of Understanding with JEA.



“ IN PENNSYLVANIA, JEA MENTORING IS CRITICAL BECAUSE WE HAVE NO STATE CERTIFICATION FOR JOURNALISM TEACHERS. HOWEVER, PSPA’S INVESTMENT IN JEA MENTORING TO SUPPORT NEW ADVISERS OVER THE YEARS HAS PRODUCED STRONG RESULTS. ”

~ JANE BLYSTONE, PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL PRESS ASSOCIATION, PRESIDENT

ABOUT US

www.jea.org mentoring.jea.org

President: Mark Newton
Vice-president: Sarah Nichols
Past President: Candace Perkins Bowen
Executive Director: Kelly Furnas



Mentor Program Committee

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