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Mentoring Program**

Five Stars Academy is fortunate to be able to attract high-trained, experienced instructors who are from, have been educated in, or both, the U.S. and Canada. Oftentimes, for our new teachers, this is their first experience in Panama and many times, their first teaching experience abroad. Not only are they experiencing a very different type of school, they are also experiencing a new culture and new way of life. We realize the pressure and stress this can put on new teachers and work diligently to assure they can acclimate to all of the new changes they are experiencing.   
  
Five Stars Academy spends time and money to identify, evaluate, hire, train, and acclimate new teachers to our school. We also request just a one-year contract at that time to eliminate stress and the emotional strain if a new instructor realizes that Panama is not a place they want to live. When a new teacher decides to leave after one year, our investment in them is lost. In addition, discontinuity of staff through attrition can harm students’ development and success. Because the stakes are high, the problems new teachers encounter during their first years of teaching demand attention.

The task of finding ways to reduce the stress felt by new teachers and the accompanying turnover rests with the school leadership. Both want to provide new teachers with all the help they need to reduce the anxiety and tension and ensure they can experience success during the first years in the classroom. To this end, we have an informal mentoring process that works to ensure satisfaction and ease into our wonderful country and school.

Our informal mentoring process is designed to answer a new teacher’s questions, provide emotional support, and assure safety and security that basic needs can be met in a new country and new school. Due to our small size, all returning staff plays a key role in assisting new teachers in this environment.

**The Mentoring Process**

Specifically, the mentoring process is necessary in four areas: (1) adjust, (2) methods to identify classroom issues, (3) establishing expectations for the school year and (4) communicating these expectations. We work diligently to meet the 4 areas.

1. Before and upon arrival: Constant communication about Five Stars Academy, life in Panama, housing, transportation, healthcare, cost of living. Included in our weekly newsletters upon hiring and acceptance. Added as a friend in our private Facebook page.
2. First week training: During the first week of training at Five Stars Academy, we expand on our discussions from above. Teachers are escorted by other teachers or the Director to the local towns, grocery stores, markets. We provide a fully-furnished apartment with high-speed internet and all the comforts of a home. We assist in cell phone set up. We provide brochures and booklets on life and travel in Panama. This is also the week where parents and families are encouraged to meet and greet the teachers. Returning staff is available to offer advice, guidance and emotional support when needed.
3. Continuous meetings (informal and formal): Again, due to our small size, much discussion and collaboration can occur spontaneously and throughout the school day. School-wide training establishes common mentoring practices so novice teachers at Five Stars Academy feel like part of the family. With continuous training, mentors and teachers new to Five Stars Academy will develop an understanding of that which is expected of each of them and how to effectively work together.
4. Observations on model classrooms: New teachers are provided an opportunity to observe successful colleagues’ classrooms. The effective model provides both a structure for observing and learning good teaching techniques and opportunities to observe these techniques in practice. In addition, we have implemented the observations tools to standardize all teacher observations and capture the data.
5. Feedback: We provide new teachers regular meetings to interact with the Director and mentors to receive feedback, discuss concerns and ask for advice.
6. Flexibility: Five Stars Academy understands that new teachers to our system need extra time to prepare the curriculum, to develop grading protocols/configuration, to become more computer literate, to obtain answers to discipline questions, and to acclimate themselves to the organization.

**EXAMPLES**

**Example 1: Barbara Pickens, Grade 2**

“Meeting with the Elementary Staff on Thursday mornings has helped me tweak and improve my teaching for my students. We have discussed ways to evaluate student learning and adjust my lessons accordingly.”