

LASE SPOTLIGHT



Cheri Fortney & Christina Harbour

We all know that the first few years as a new director can be a bit overwhelming. It helps to have a great mentor who understands all the demands our jobs entail and the support from a group of peers through a regional LASE group. It was a great pleasure to sit down recently and talk with mentor, Cheri Fortney, from the Franklin County Special Education Cooperative LASE Group, and recent mentee, Christina Harbour, from the Sullivan School District, about their experiences.

CHERI, YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE MENTORING PROCESS THROUGH THE MO-CASE ADMINISTRATOR MENTORING PROGRAM (AMP) FOR NEW DIRECTORS. WHAT WAS THE VALUE OF THIS SERVICE OVER JUST FINDING SOMEONE IN YOUR DISTRICT TO PROVIDE THE TWO YEARS OF REQUIRED MENTORING?

Participation in a mentoring program is important because new directors don't know what they don't know. I worry about the new Special Education Directors with little experience in Special Education. There are so many different scenarios and unique situations that come about and it is not possible to cover all of that in a workshop. All directors benefit from collaboration with others in the field. We learn from each other. Luckily, Christina was not new to Special Education. She has been a special education teacher and process coordinator. Mentoring Christina was also beneficial for me. Helping her navigate compliance and legal issues broadened my knowledge.

CHRISTINA, IN WHAT WAYS DID YOUR REGIONAL LASE GROUP FURTHER SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR FIRST FEW YEARS AS A NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR?

First and foremost, I would say support with compliance and legal questions, especially for the first few years, because staying in compliance (and out of due process) was something I worried about all of the time. I looked forward to our monthly meetings because it was a room full of other directors that I could lean on and get advice from. I still look forward to our monthly meetings. Cheri does a great job of scheduling guest speakers that guide us on topics that are important to best practices in special education. I learn something every time I go!

CHERI, AS A LEADER IN YOUR REGIONAL LASE GROUP, WHAT DID YOUR GROUP PUT IN PLACE TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE SUPPORTING NEW DIRECTORS IN YOUR AREA?

I developed a survey in Google Forms and sent it to the members of the LASE group. I asked for the name of the Director of Special Education, the years of experience, and whether they have a mentor, need a mentor, or are they currently a mentor. I also asked whether they had attended New Director Training with DESE/MO-CASE. After collecting this information, I contacted the directors needing mentors and training and provided the information regarding AMP and training at RPDC. We are fortunate to have a diverse LASE group. We have a wide range of experience and everyone is open to giving and receiving advice.

If you are interested in information on how to become a mentor or mentee, check out the New Directors tab on the MO-CASE website. For information on a regional LASE group in your area, please check out the LASE tab from the MO-CASE website or feel free to contact Liz Smith at esmith@wolves.k12.mo.us.

