



The Park School of Baltimore
Guidelines for Mentors
2026 - 2027

THE PARK SCHOOL
GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS
2026-2027

INITIAL CONTACTS: (Summer and Orientation)

Summer:

1. Call or email to make initial contact and offer informal assistance. Refer new faculty members to others at school who can assist with specific needs:
 - a. Keys - Divisional Administrative Assistant
 - b. Parking tags, Employee ID Cards - Director of Facilities
 - c. Supplies - Divisional or Administrative Assistant to the Associate Head
 - d. Email, voicemail, and phone access card - Director of IT
 - e. General assistance – Administrative Assistant to the Associate Head
2. Arrange a time to speak for any additional needs.
3. Arrange time for **five days of curricular support to be completed prior to the first day of school**. Inform the Associate Head when that work is complete.

New Employee Orientation (August 24-26):

1. Attend specific orientation activities as needed and able.
2. Find time to discuss sections of the *Faculty Guide* that you think would initially be most helpful. Offer assistance as needed with tech, room preparation, getting books and materials, etc.
3. Review the following with your partner:
 - **New Student Orientation(s)**: Go over plans for divisional orientations and explain the nature of activities and expectations for this day.
 - **Get To Know You Conferences** (Lower School, August 31 - September 2): Explain the goals and process to the new faculty member.
 - **First Day of School** (Wednesday, September 2): Discuss important logistics of the day, including the schedule, getting class sets of books or materials, etc., setting expectations, and questions to anticipate from students and families.

OPENING OF SCHOOL:

First Week:

1. Touch base with your partner briefly each day.
2. Create a schedule for weekly meetings.

Back-to-School Nights:

Explain the purpose of the evening, format, important information to convey, handouts, and materials to have available. Urge the new faculty member to consult with their department chair (Middle and Upper Schools) or grade level colleagues (Lower School) regarding particular curricular information that should be shared. Also, help the new faculty member to anticipate situations that may arise (typical questions, parents' efforts to initiate discussion about their child's progress, etc.).

Lower School: Thursday, September 17, 6:45-8:45pm

Middle School: Thursday, September 3, 6:15-9:30pm
Upper School: Thursday, September 10, 6:45-8:45pm

RESPONSIBILITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:

Weekly meetings with your partner: Weekly meetings must be scheduled at the very beginning of the year. Annual feedback has shown that scheduled weekly meetings during the first semester and regular meetings beyond that are extremely important. (Bring any scheduling questions to Associate Head's attention.)

New Faculty Forum: We will schedule five to six New Faculty Forums throughout the year for new faculty members. Dates TBD. Mentors do not attend these meetings.

Meetings with Division Principals: Mentors should periodically check-in with their division principal throughout the year.

Class Visits: In Middle and Upper Schools, department chairs and the division principal will schedule visits to new faculty members' classrooms and will provide formal feedback in follow-up conversations. In the Lower School, the division principal and assistant principal share these responsibilities. Equally important, however, are visits by new teachers to colleagues' classrooms. As mentors, support new faculty in setting up observations and to process the experiences with your partner. Mentors should reach out to division principals if there are scheduling challenges for new faculty members to visit other classrooms.

September: As able, invite your partner to visit your class at least once. In addition, please assist your partner in arranging additional visits, which seem useful.

October: Assist your partner in continuing to visit a colleague's class each week. Devise at least one situation in which you team with your partner or invite your partner to participate with you (in your class or the partner's, in an activity or an advisory group).

Remainder of the Year: Additional visits based on your assessment (and your partner's) of what would be most useful.

Inclusion of Partner in Other Activities: Create opportunities to include your partner in forums through which the new faculty member can build relationships with other faculty and/or students. (For example, if you advise an activity, coach, serve on a committee or as a class advisor, invite the new faculty member to attend a gathering of this group. Invite the new faculty member to attend events with you: sports events, plays and concerts, etc.).

Monthly Review of Calendar: Review the calendar (divisional and whole school) for the month with your partner. Provide information that will help your partner to anticipate what lies ahead, especially if an event will affect classes or place additional demands on teachers.

Assistance with Reporting and Parent Conferences/Meetings: In Middle and Upper Schools, department chairs take primary responsibility for assisting new faculty with writing reports and

grading (Upper School), since guidance oriented to a specific department seems most useful. However, in all three divisions, mentors are asked to take responsibility for the following:

- Lay out the full academic year's reporting structures
- Advise on lead time and preparatory steps needed in writing reports and preparing for conferences
 - Lower School: provide full orientation, with samples, to use of portfolios and structures for conferences (parent/student/teacher)
 - Middle and Upper School: provide guidance on the advisor's role in parent conferences
- Help the new faculty member to handle difficult issues
- Alert the new faculty member about when to seek assistance from the advisor, department chair, and/or division principal
- Assist the new faculty member on when and how parents should be notified of issues

PRIMARY AREAS OF ATTENTION THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Logistics and Routines: Provide help in negotiating Park's procedures and systems, which is especially critical at the beginning of the year. Review daily and weekly schedules, faculty duties, required meetings.

Curricular Support: For those whose partners are at the same grade level or in the same department, provide background information, resources, advice. For those (Middle and Upper Schools) in different departments, ensure that the new faculty member receives needed support from the department chair and departmental colleagues. If you have concerns about support, notify the division principal and Associate Head. Be sure the new faculty member has copies of texts, materials, and pertinent documents (advisory materials, departmental or grade level curricular outlines, FACA reports, etc.).

Classroom Management: Help the new faculty member set up appropriate expectations and anticipate situations. Offer support and advice in response to specific issues or incidents. For Middle and Upper School, be specific about questions that are likely to arise: leaving class, eating in class, homework, test and grading policies, etc. ***Notify the division principal and the Associate Head of any serious or ongoing issues.***

Advisory System: New full-time Middle and Upper School faculty may have advisees. New faculty need full information about responsibilities of the role in relation to individual students and parents. In addition, new faculty need advice on how to use advisory periods and how to build a cohesive advisory group.

Orientation to the Division: Inform the new faculty member about guidance and advisory structures, major divisional initiatives, and special events. Assist the new faculty member with specific background information pertinent to particular meetings or topics for discussion. (Sitting with your partner at meetings early in the year would be helpful.)

Relationships with Colleagues: Assist new faculty members in making contact with other faculty, identifying affinities of interest or background. Be an advocate for the new faculty member, ensuring that the person's talents and strengths are made known to others, that their voice is heard, and that they feel comfortable in meetings.

Relationships with Parents/Caregivers: Assist the new faculty member in establishing cooperative, trusting relationships with parents/caregivers. Make specific suggestions (newsletters and parent volunteers in Lower School). Advise new faculty on how to respond to parental concerns or complaints; how to handle parent meetings (and who should be there) if the parent is raising a significant issue or challenge. *Notify the division principal and Associate Head of any serious and ongoing issues.*

Communications Guidelines for Faculty and Families: At the beginning of the school year, faculty (lead classroom teacher, advisors) should reach out to families to establish the best ways for communication throughout the academic year (by email or phone). At Park, we have determined that *24 hours is a reasonable amount of time for school personnel to respond to parent emails or phone calls*. Families should note that messages left after 12:45 p.m. on a Friday might not be answered until the following Monday. Texting teachers or advisors is not appropriate unless specific permission is given by the school employee. In an emergency, families should call their division principal or a school counselor if necessary.

Support Structures: Assist new faculty in identifying whom to go to for support on particular issues and what recourse is available to them if difficult situations arise. New faculty need to understand the roles of Middle and Upper School advisors and to be urged to call upon them for information and assistance. In addition, new faculty need to understand the kind of support available from resource teachers, guidance counselors, division principals, Associate Head, and Head of School. Being specific is helpful: when to send a student out of class; what to do if they encounter a behavioral incident in a common space; how to obtain background information on and seek help for a student who is having serious academic or emotional difficulties; what should be reported immediately to the division principals and/or Head of School.

Orientation to Park Philosophy: Assist the faculty member in understanding Park's philosophy and approach to education. Based on responses from previous cohorts, this is the most complex challenge to being new to the Park community. Emphasis on positive expectations, mutual trust, and supporting natural curiosity is essential. (The section on "The Role of the Teacher at Park" in the *Faculty Guide* provides an introduction to these issues and might provide a useful base for discussion.)

Personal Relationships: The ideal is to establish a warm, personal, informal relationship that helps to sustain a new faculty member over the rough spots, pays attention to the new faculty member's well-being, and helps the new person to feel accepted and welcomed into the community. The more informal contacts you can manage the better (lunches, email messages, social contacts away from school).

A recent cohort of Park mentors read an article about effective mentorship, *No More Nice Mentors* by Nina Weisling and Wendy Gardiner, and felt it was useful. The following is an excerpt from the article.

Mentors Speaking Truth to Their Colleagues

“Socialized niceness is a significant barrier to equity work,” say Nina Weisling (Carthage College) and Wendy Gardiner (Pacific Lutheran University) in this Kappan article.

“Because it is subconscious, people driven by niceness may not even recognize it – or its negative effects.” Some of the ways it manifests itself:

- Avoiding or ignoring conflict;
- Not discussing controversial topics, especially race;
- People-pleasing and rule-following;
- Downplaying one’s own knowledge and expertise.

Girls are raised to be nice and maintain the comfort of others, say Weisling and Gardiner. Most teachers and mentors in K-12 schools are women, and niceness is a significant factor when it comes to avoiding difficult conversations about classroom practices like these:

- Not calling on students equitably;
- Using low-rigor, low-relevance materials;
- Disproportionately sending students of color to the office;
- Giving more attention to children who “want to learn”;
- Using non-affirming language like “IEP kids”;
- Refusing to use students’ preferred names or pronouns;
- Blaming children or their families for “not achieving”;
- Using books with stereotypes or harmful language;
- Using books about people of color only around designated holidays or months;
- Excluding students with disabilities from field trips and other opportunities.

“Mentors are in a position to recognize and disrupt inequitable patterns in individual classrooms and across the school,” say Weisling and Gardiner, “but only if they can recognize and work through their socialized niceness... For every hesitation a mentor fails to push through, there is a classroom full of children experiencing and internalizing the effects of implicit and overt bias. Mentors must be willing to recognize and challenge socialized niceness to engage in meaningful, practice-changing dialogue with teachers.” Some key steps:

- Being in touch with the fear that others will see you as not nice – hurting others’ feelings or making them angry – which can disrupt trusting relationships that are essential to being effective. Know that a topic like race or disability may be uncomfortable and make you feel insecure about launching a critique of a colleague’s classroom practices.

- Recognizing that pushing through socialized niceness won't necessarily harm a trusting relationship. "A mentor does not have to choose between a strong relationship with teachers and a willingness to challenge inequitable practices," say Weisling and Gardiner. "Part of building a strong mentoring relationship is transparency, honesty, and productive struggle to improve practice."
- Reading up on equity issues and thinking through one's own issues with race. "We recommend finding an accountability partner to review and discuss resources and prepare for challenging debriefs," say the authors. "This lifelong journey won't be easy."
- Investing in relationships with colleagues early in the school year; listening deeply to each teacher, understanding their why, their beliefs about children, how they receive feedback; then co-planning and co-teaching, doing demonstration lessons, establishing a pattern of communicating during lessons, and watching classroom videos together.
- Choosing verbal strategies like these when debriefing with a teacher after seeing a problematic practice:
 - *Here is what I noticed... Let's explore this together.*
 - *Is there another way of looking at ____.*
 - *When ____ happened, what message do you think ____ might have heard?*
 - *I think ____ is the source of ____.*
 - *Maybe we should explore ____.*
 - *Are you open to the possibility that ____?*
 - *There is research that supports ____.*
- Working with empathy, skill, and persistence when teachers react by saying that "those kids" can't handle rigorous work; claiming to be "color-blind;" saying they're not racist; joking to minimize the issue; deflecting or changing the topic; crying, getting angry. This is when the mentor's investment in the relationship with the teacher can really pay off.

"Our students deserve no less," conclude Weisling and Gardiner.