

Governors State University

## OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship

---

Newsroom

Marketing and Communications

---

3-5-2021

### Developing New Educational Leaders through Mentorship

Office of Marketing and Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opus.govst.edu/newsroom>

---

University Park, IL,  
March  
05,  
2021

# Developing New Educational Leaders through Mentorship



Retired Principal Dot Jeter and

R.J. Neal are a match made for Governors State University's [New Leaders Mentor Program](#) (NLMP) offered through the [School of Extended Learning](#) (SXL).

Jeter, who served in School Districts 149, 155 and 148 for 33 years, 24 years as an administrator, has always gone the extra mile to provide additional support to mentee Neal from Lincoln Early Learning Center School in Dixmoor.

A unquestioning believer in the power of mentorship, Jeter said the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforced this belief "because of the uniqueness of the challenges presented to all of us."

Jeter, a Golden Apple Stanley C. Golder Leadership Award Finalist, and mentee R.J. Neal are part of the NLMP program, which pairs experienced school leaders (mentors)

with new school administrators (protégés) to provide encouragement and address new leaders' needs for sustained professional partnerships.

Mentor-protégé teams communicate virtually or face to face for a minimum of 50 hours throughout the school year. Mentors and protégés may meet at the school building, by phone, or virtually to problem-solve and share successes.

"I will do whatever it takes to make my protégé successful," Jeter said, repeating a promise she has always made—even when she was in the classroom.

"You have to provide support and say what they can do to improve. It gives them something to work towards."

The program, which has been in operation through SXL for the past three years, added the virtual component in 2020 and grew participation by 49 percent. It now serves ten South Suburban Chicago school districts. The goal for the upcoming year is to extend hybrid mentoring services to Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana.

This is Neal's third year in the NLMP with Jeter as a mentor. Neal says she feels "grateful for the program for its wealth of knowledge." As principal of an early learning center, Neal has experienced new challenges each of the three years in the role—pandemic aside.

"To me, you get something new from the program each year. The first year, I was a novice. The second year progresses into other topics. Now, during the pandemic, there are things you might never think of. Dot has been through so many situations that she can share ideas for me to try or have connections who might be able to help," Neal says.

Jeter tells her, "If you have a problem and I can't solve it, I'm going to find someone who can help you solve this problem."



Neal is preparing her building for in-person learning. She says that her PreK and kindergarten students are managing fine remotely since they are technology natives. “People underestimate our young ones. This is their era.”

The program provides participants with more than mentoring. Monthly virtual professional development sessions during the pandemic focused on social emotional learning and self-care for the administrators and staff. Self-care was particularly helpful, Jeter thought, and she enjoyed teaching her own workshop entitled "Difficult Conversations." Neal said that some of the most powerful advice she has received has been from this workshop.

“I learned to remove the personal response; it’s not personal. State the facts, stay calm, and don’t get off topic.”

Feedback from the workshop indicated that other participants found it extremely beneficial as well. They said they could now recognize past missteps and know how to correct them in the future. Jeter shared that you have to “walk a mile in their shoes. It’s not what you say sometimes, but how you say it.”

Other sessions offered included: Time Management for Leaders, Understanding the Framework of Poverty, Incorporating Equity in the School Improvement Process, How to Develop a Resilience Program for At-Risk Students, Refining Your Personal Leadership Style, and more.

“The program is, in a way, its own form of self-care because it gives you information you need to take care of your job, which in turn is taking care of you,” Neal said.

Jeter likes the NLMP for personal reasons too. “It keeps me abreast of current trends in education; keeps me on my P’s and Q’s.”

If you ask Neal what she will do when the program is over, she does not hesitate a bit. “I’m going to call Dot, whether she likes it or not. She is a lifelong mentor.”

To inquire about starting your own mentor or protégé relationship, contact Dr. Sandra R. Mickles, NLMP Coordinator at [smickles2@govst.edu](mailto:smickles2@govst.edu) or Katie Rosales, Program Coordinator at [Kkarstensen@govst.edu](mailto:Kkarstensen@govst.edu).

More details about workshops for the coming year will be announced online in early spring at [www.govst.edu/educator-training](http://www.govst.edu/educator-training).