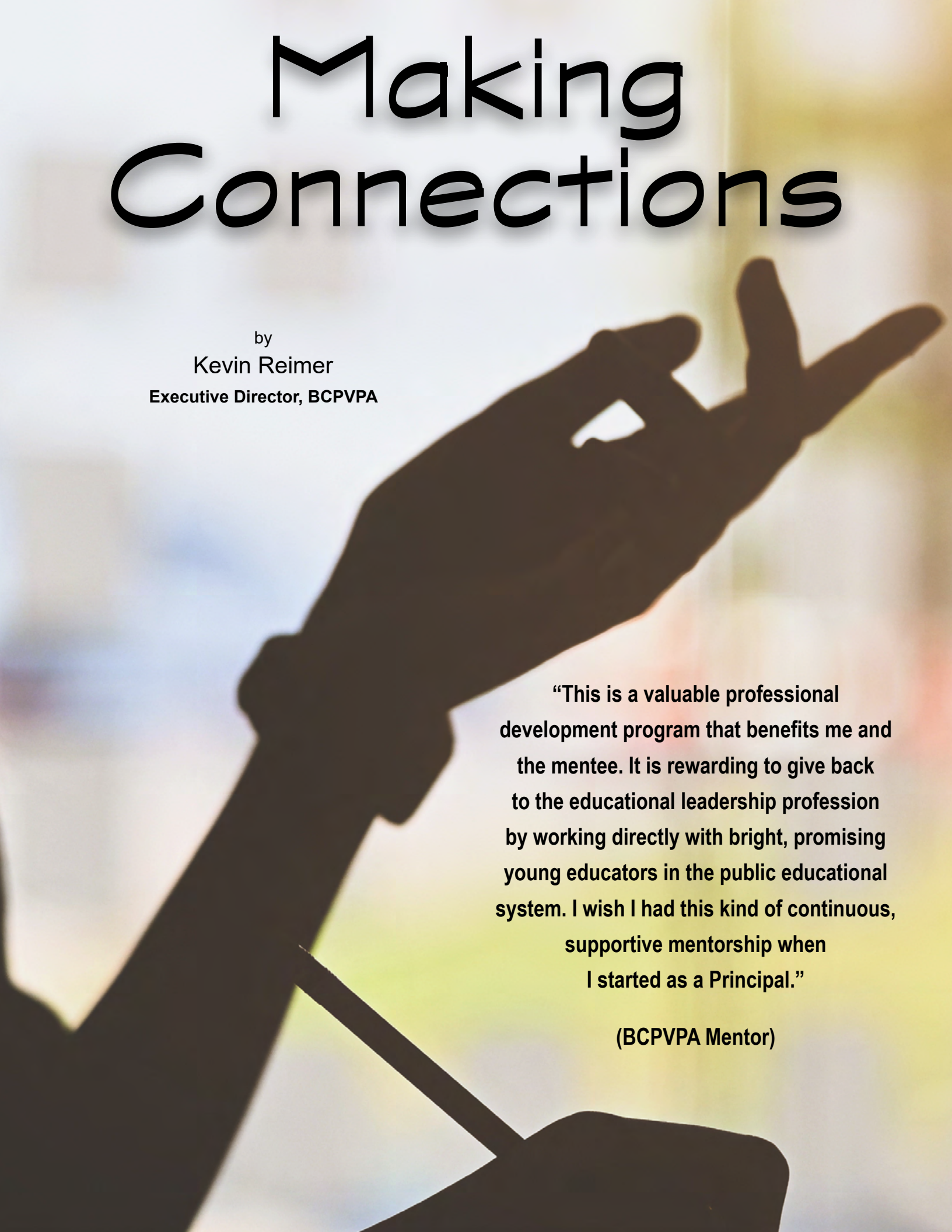


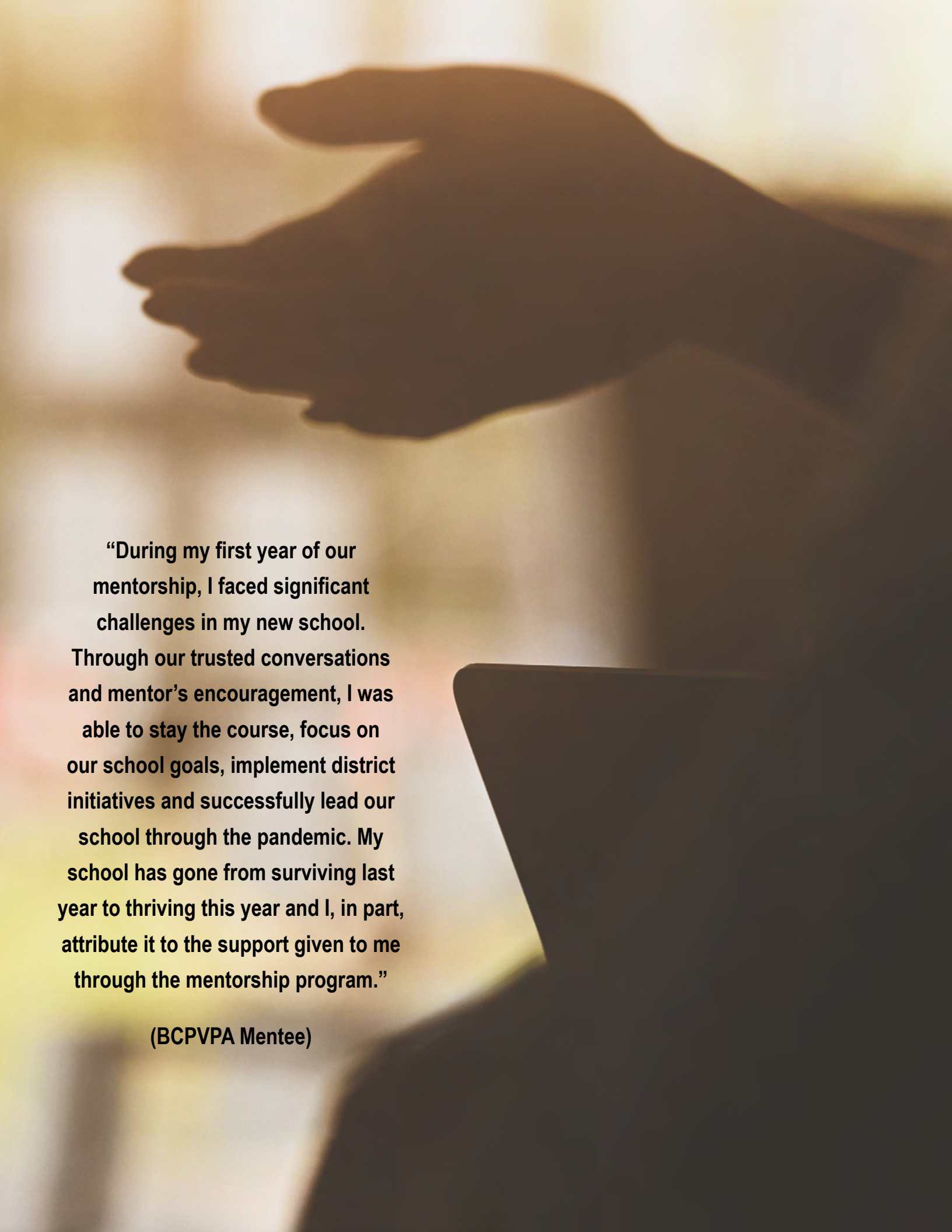
Making Connections



by
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“This is a valuable professional development program that benefits me and the mentee. It is rewarding to give back to the educational leadership profession by working directly with bright, promising young educators in the public educational system. I wish I had this kind of continuous, supportive mentorship when I started as a Principal.”

(BCPVPA Mentor)



“During my first year of our mentorship, I faced significant challenges in my new school.

Through our trusted conversations and mentor’s encouragement, I was able to stay the course, focus on our school goals, implement district initiatives and successfully lead our school through the pandemic. My school has gone from surviving last year to thriving this year and I, in part, attribute it to the support given to me through the mentorship program.”

(BCPVPA Mentee)



Schools in BC are complex, collaborative institutions requiring a high level of performance from every professional in the school or the program. Ultimately, school success begins with the school leader(s) who are responsible for ensuring the highest levels of learning for all students. The Principal's leadership skills often determine the degree to which the school becomes a dynamic and responsive place of learning.

Highly skilled school leaders do not emerge from the teaching ranks fully prepared to capably address any challenge. Hopefully, there has been an investment in rigorous programs that deliberately build the Principal's capacity to effectively lead their school.

Recognizing the importance and need for quality mentorship for its members, the BCPVPA initiated a provincial Mentorship Program in collaboration with the BC Retired Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association five years ago. The intent was to

design a program to support new Principals and Vice-Principals all over British Columbia as they embarked on their leadership careers. In the early days, the program engaged both working and retired Principals as mentors partnered primarily with newly-appointed Vice-Principals. A significant goal of the program was to address the diverse experiences and needs of school leaders across the range of urban, suburban, and rural areas of the province.

The BCPVPA Mentorship Program was founded on the following principles:

- **Openness** – Access is provided to new and developing school leaders throughout the province
- **Voluntary** – Participation is encouraged, but not mandated
- **Non-Judgmental** – The focus is on learning and growth, and mentors act as agents of development

- **Relational** – The pairing recognizes and respects the importance of trust-based relationships, recognizing the need for vulnerability and confidentiality
- **Individualized** – Tailored to the needs of the mentee
- **Learner-Focused** – Understands that learning is reciprocal, and that both mentors and mentees should benefit from this process
- **Flexible** – Offers a variety of methods for mentors and mentees to connect and develop their relationship

When the benefits of a provincial mentoring program were discussed, the conversation quickly turned to who could facilitate this program on our behalf. The BCPVPA reached out to Alison Davies, a former teacher who had coordinated and led the province's New Teacher Mentoring Project. We were very fortunate to have Alison capably

lead this program through its first five years, and we thank her for her skillful facilitation. Alison is moving on to an exciting new opportunity with Vancouver Island University, and the program will now be led internally by Magdalena Kassis, Director of Member Support Services, and Andrea McComb, Director of Professional Learning and Development. The team will have more to share in the new year about their ideas for the program. So, what have we learned from mentors and mentees over the past five years? At the end of every year, we survey both the mentors and the mentees to find out more about their experience in the program, and what they learned along the way.

Consistently, mentees over the years have shared similar responses, and one of the key takeaways has been how the mentoring opportunity helped them build confidence in their developing leadership skillset. Mentees often shared with the BCPVPA the following benefits of the program:



- The mentoring relationship helped the mentees broaden their perspectives
- It was important to the mentee's development to secure the space and time to share and talk openly about the issues that they were addressing as a school leader
- Mentees appreciated the validation and positive reinforcement of their strengths and abilities that emerged through the conversations
- Mentees found that the ability to reflect through a guided discussion led to better-informed decision-making, and that practicing complex scenarios helped them to better prepare for the inevitable leadership challenges that would arise

We heard consistently that mentees greatly preferred working with a mentor who was not a colleague in the same school district. Mentees regularly expressed concern about their ability to engage in genuine dialogue, and their reluctance to be vulnerable with a mentor who worked in the same school district. Additionally, mentees stated consistently that the program facilitated

their development as instructional leaders, and that this positively impacted student success.

Over the past two years, the additional demanding challenge of leading schools through a pandemic has weighed on the mentees. They appreciated the regular mentoring conversations that helped them navigate the changing protocols, staffing challenges, and endless disruptions of the past two years. Our hope is that the return to school in September will allow mentors and mentees the opportunity to discuss more than the most recent health and safety protocols.

While we are excited to facilitate an ongoing broadening and evolution of the BCPVPA Mentorship Program, we believe that we will be building on the learning and successes of the past. Mentees commented that the program has enhanced their skillset in many ways, through improving listening skills, practicing empathy and patience, better understanding the needs of diverse populations, seeing different ways of approaching challenges, and expanding their own understanding of their strengths, abilities, and role in leading their schools.

"Positive and strong mentorship is the ONE thing I pride myself on having in my career, and for that I will be forever grateful! BCPVPA and (my mentor) are now a part of my story – how wonderful! I would happily recommend the mentorship program to another VP, and would be happy to mentor in the future!"

(Mentee, 2022)

"I will be forever grateful to have made the connection I have. I know that this will be a lifelong friendship."

(Mentee, 2022)

