

SMALLER  
**LEARNING COMMUNITIES**  
PROGRAM

**Implementing Effective Youth Mentoring  
Relationships for High School Students**

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# Introduction

For nearly two decades, educators and policymakers have recognized that personalizing large, faceless high schools can play an important role in improving student achievement and success, particularly for young people who enter high school without a solid academic foundation. Breaking down large high schools into freshman academies, career academies, and other types of smaller learning communities has become a common reform strategy.

These structural changes are often complemented by the implementation of other personalization strategies such as teacher advisories and family advocates (Quint et al., 2008). Many of these schools are also introducing programs such as tutoring and internships that connect individual students with specific adults. Student mentoring programs, in particular, are becoming an increasingly popular personalization strategy.

Research has shown the importance of caring adults in the lives of children and youth. The support and guidance of caring adults is the cornerstone of the Five Promises—key developmental resources that young people need to succeed—identified by America’s Promise Alliance, a nonprofit focused on improving the lives of children (America’s Promise Alliance, n.d.). The presence of positive adult role models and the support of at least three nonrelated adults are part of the nonprofit Search Institute’s Developmental Assets—what they consider to be the building blocks for healthy development (Search Institute, n.d.).

Mentoring provides an alternative for youth whose parents are unable to fulfill a mentoring role and serves as an additional resource for youth whose parents are engaged in their lives. Research has shown mentoring to be particularly effective for youth who face environmental risk factors such as poverty (Rhodes and DuBois, 2006). In this context, mentoring should be explored as one component of the overall remedy to the high school dropout crisis.

Although mentoring has traditionally been an intervention geared more toward younger students (i.e., elementary and early middle school students) (Bernstein et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2007), it holds unrealized potential in serving high school students. A mentor could be uniquely positioned to help a young person navigate the process of transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, work, or career training—that is, if the mentoring is done well.

With that in mind, this paper will explore the fundamentals of effective youth mentoring. Because the vast majority of mentoring literature focuses on community-based mentoring (CBM), we will pay particular attention to school-based mentoring (SBM), especially SBM directed to high school students. Creating and sustaining mentoring relationships that lead to desired outcomes requires several key elements:

- resources;
- infrastructure;
- support;
- knowledge of effective mentoring; and
- realistic expectations about the benefits and challenges of mentoring.

## Background/Summary of Research

Our modern understanding of mentoring has been shaped by the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program. BBBS began matching young people with caring adult mentors in CBM more than 100 years ago in an effort to provide support to youth coming through the juvenile court system (BBBS, n.d.). Recently, mentoring efforts have grown exponentially, fueled by support from both political parties (Rhodes and DuBois, 2006). This explosion in youth mentoring has created a number of new mentoring models with different contexts (e.g., settings), structures (e.g., peer, group) and goals (Karcher et al., 2006).

It seems important, therefore, to establish a definition of youth mentoring. According to the *Elements of Effective Practice*, responsible mentoring is a structured one-to-one (other structures are permitted) relationship that focuses on the needs of mentees and encourages them to meet their potential (MENTOR, 2009). Given this definition, it seems both logical and intuitive that mentoring should work. But does it?

Although the concept of mentoring is not new, research on and evaluation of mentoring programs is fairly recent. The first comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of youth mentoring was published in 1995 by Public/Private Ventures. This study found a number of positive outcomes for youth in BBBS programs, including improved school attendance and performance, better parental and peer relationships, and reduced initiation of drug and alcohol use (Tierney and Grossman, 1995). Subsequent research has suggested that mentoring can result in positive outcomes for youth in a number of areas, including education, health and safety, and social and behavioral interaction (Jekielek et al., 2002). Specifically, after participating in mentoring programs, some youth have reported improvements in self-esteem; better parental and peer relationships; greater connectedness to school; improved academic performance; and reductions in substance use, violence, and other risky behaviors (Cavell et al., 2009).

The effectiveness of mentoring, however, depends on the quality of the mentoring relationship. Research suggests a strong connection between the benefits that youth experience from mentoring and the closeness of the mentor/mentee relationship. Trust, empathy, authenticity, and common interests are important components of close relationships.

In their seminal paper on mentoring relationships, Morrow and Styles (1995) found that mentoring relationships that are developmental in nature—in which the mentor focuses on building the relationship—are more satisfying for both mentees and mentors. These relationships focus on the individual needs of the youth, involve youth in decision-making, and place a high priority on having fun (Morrow and Styles, 1995). In contrast, prescriptive mentoring relationships emphasize transforming the youth by achieving certain goals established by the mentor. Morrow and Styles (1995) found these types of relationships to be less satisfying for both mentors and mentees. This does not mean that effective mentors are simply adult friends that offer youth unconditional support. In fact, the most beneficial relationships seem to be those in which mentors offer moderate levels of support, structure, and activities (Rhodes, 2007).

Another key element of effective mentoring relationships is their duration. One study found that positive outcomes were the greatest when relationships lasted 12 months or longer, and that positive outcomes decreased for relationships lasting 6 to 12 months and 3 to 6 months (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Notably, youth in relationships that lasted less than 3 months *regressed* in some areas (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). That is, the youth were worse off after their mentoring experience than youth who had never had a mentor. Subsequent research has suggested that fewer than 6 months of mentoring may be detrimental to youth, but that meeting the mentee's expectations for the duration of the relationship seems to be the most important criteria in preventing harmful effects (Rhodes and DuBois, 2006).

Mentoring programs can help foster close, effective relationships and increase the likelihood of the relationship's success by following certain evidence-based "best practices." These include ensuring rigorous screening and training for mentors, providing ongoing support to mentors, offering structured activities, involving parents, and monitoring the program to make improvements (Cavell et al., 2009; DuBois, 2002). For a complete list of research-supported best practices, see the section titled Recommendation: Learn about Mentoring Best Practices.

Until recently, most of the existing body of research focused on the traditional model of matching one adult mentor with one child in a CBM setting. In CBM, mentor/mentee pairs meet at a variety of locations in the community, and the young person is usually referred to the program by a parent or guardian. The minimum expected duration of the relationship varies by program but is often 1 full year. In contrast, SBM pairs meet almost exclusively on school grounds (some programs offer group field trips) and rely primarily on teachers and other school staff for referrals. SBM relationships traditionally begin whenever a match occurs and last until the end of the school year.

In 2007, a study of the impact of the BBBS SBM program was released. The study cited a number of positive impacts resulting from the program, including increases in overall academic performance (specifically, the quality of class work and the number of assignments turned in) and scholastic efficacy, and decreases in serious school

infractions and skipping school (Herrera et al., 2007). Notably, in contrast to findings from CBM studies, Herrera et al. (2007) found no impacts in out-of-school areas such as self-esteem, parental or peer relationships, or drug and alcohol use. This finding suggests that the potential impacts of SBM are distinct from those of CBM. Other smaller studies have also found positive outcomes resulting from SBM, most notably increases in school connectedness (Portwood et al., 2005; Karcher, 2008), a critical component of retention, participation, and achievement in school.

The BBBS SBM study looked at the impact of having a mentor in isolation—that is, it compared youth who had a mentor with those who did not. Another study looked at mentoring in the context of other supports. The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE) examined participants in a multicomponent program, Communities in School—San Antonio (CIS-SA), who received a number of support services (Karcher, 2008). The study compared those students who received just the standard services with those who received the standard services plus mentoring. Students who received mentoring reported increases in self-esteem, connectedness to peers, and social support from friends, despite the relatively short duration of the matches. This finding suggests that there is an “additive” effect when mentoring is combined with other interventions (Karcher, 2008).

## Lessons Learned

There is much to be learned from unsuccessful mentoring attempts, both at the relationship and the programmatic level. In her research on why mentoring relationships fail, Spencer (2007) identifies six themes that contribute to early match termination:

- mentor or mentee abandonment;
- perceived lack of mentee motivation;
- unfulfilled expectations;
- deficiencies in mentor relational skills, including the ability to bridge cultural divides;
- family interference; and
- inadequate agency support.

By understanding these common causes of premature termination, mentoring programs have a tremendous opportunity to build solutions to these challenges into their program design and implementation. Although these insights may improve the likelihood of success for individual mentoring relationships, there are other lessons to be learned about program implementation from broader mentoring initiatives.

The impact evaluations of three major SBM initiatives—the U.S. Department of Education’s Student Mentoring Program (SMP), BBBS SBM, and CIS-SA—offer valuable insights (Bernstein et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2008). All three evaluations found that the average mentoring relationships lasted less than 6 months, which could, in part, account for the relationships’ limited impacts. Interestingly, however, there is a significant disparity in the findings from the three studies.

- The SMP evaluation found no statistically significant outcomes from mentoring (Bernstein et al., 2009).
- The BBBS SBM study found improvements in a number of school-related outcomes, as discussed earlier (Herrera et al., 2007).
- The CIS-SA study found improvements in a few outcomes but suggested differences in impact based on age and gender (Karcher, 2008).

This paper examines each of these evaluations individually before attempting to explain their seemingly inconsistent findings.

Looking at the SMP study reveals that the program had three intended outcomes: improved interpersonal relationships, personal responsibility, and community involvement; improved school engagement and academic achievement; and reduced high-risk or delinquent behaviors. The evaluation found no statistically significant outcomes in any of these areas. As discussed earlier, SBM as a standalone intervention has not proven to be effective on non-school-related outcomes, which may explain the lack of impacts in the first and third intended outcomes. Another possible explanation for the lack of impact on outcomes is the relatively high percentage of treatment group youth (i.e., youth who would receive mentors) in the SMP study who were not actually matched with mentors (17 percent), compared to the BBBS SBM study (7 percent) and the CIS-SA study (10 percent) (Wheeler et al., 2010).

With respect to the second intended outcome, that of school-related impacts, the issue may simply be one of timing. Student surveys intended to determine impact were administered in the fall, before matching took place, and again in the spring. However, many mentees were not matched with a mentor until a few months into the school year, meaning that they had been with their mentors for only a few months when the second surveys were completed. Even those matches that began immediately following the initial survey had been matched for less than 6 months when the follow-up survey was given. The evaluation may have looked for outcomes too soon, before the mentoring was able to have an impact. Both the content of the desired outcomes and the timeline for achieving them suggest that expectations for the SMP, although admirable, may have been unrealistic. It is hoped that the failure of this initiative to achieve its goals will lead to improvements in program design and implementation in the future.

The BBBS SBM impact study (Herrera et al., 2007) offers a number of recommendations that provide insight into how SBM programs can be made more effective for young people. For example, only one of the outcomes mentioned earlier, the reduced likelihood of a student starting to skip school, was sustained into the following school year. The study also found that due to a variety of factors (e.g., late start-up, school vacations), the average mentoring relationship lasted only about 5 months, and that longer matches and closer relationships were associated with stronger impacts. Herrera and colleagues (2007) offer a number of suggestions to improve the length, quality, and continuity of SBM relationships, including starting the matches as early in the school year as possible, exploring ways to bridge the “summer gap” when most matches have no contact, and providing additional ongoing training and support to help mentors develop close relationships with their mentees.

The CIS-SA study also offers some insight into mentoring for high school youth. Karcher (2008) found the greatest impacts for high school–aged girls and elementary-aged boys and the least impacts for high school–aged boys. Although a definitive explanation for this difference requires more research, youth of different ages and genders may simply perceive mentoring differently (Karcher and Herrera, 2007). Interestingly, the CIS-SA study also found that matches talked about academics three times more in high school than did matches in elementary school (Karcher, 2009), even though using a prescriptive approach to mentoring (in this case, focusing too much on academics) has been shown to be ineffective. These findings suggest the need for specialized mentoring. Program administrators should examine the unique needs of the youth they serve and design their program accordingly.

Each of these program evaluations offers valuable insight on its own. However, the discrepancies in the studies’ findings could lead to confusion about the effectiveness of SBM. A recent issue of the *Social Policy Report* (Wheeler et al., 2010) examined all three studies and found a number of factors that help explain the variation in findings. These factors include the criteria for including agencies in the study, variation in the program models, and implementation fidelity.

Most importantly, each study used different criteria to determine the statistical significance of the program’s impact on outcomes (Wheeler et al., 2010). The SMP study used the most stringent criteria, and the BBBS SBM program the most lenient (Wheeler et al., 2010). When the same criteria were applied to all three studies, there was greater consistency in the impact across studies (Wheeler et al., 2010). As Wheeler and colleagues explain, “using the middle ground criterion . . . the BBBS study would have reported significant impacts on seven outcomes, the SMP study five, and the CIS-SA study four,” suggesting much less disparity among outcomes than originally thought.

Wheeler and colleagues also conducted a metaanalysis of the three studies and found positive effects on six outcomes: truancy, support from nonfamilial adults, perceived

scholastic efficacy, school-related misconduct, peer support, and absenteeism (Wheeler et al., 2010), thus reinforcing the potential benefits of SBM.

## Obstacles to Successful Implementation

As mentioned earlier, mentoring is appealing as an intervention in part because it intuitively makes sense—providing young people with supportive adults seems like a good idea that should be easy to implement. The downside of this widespread belief is the notion that mentoring can act as a panacea for all risks faced by youth. This belief has resulted in ill-designed programs or initiatives being created with aims that are beyond the potential outcomes supported by research or that serve specific risk groups that have not yet been shown to benefit from mentoring. Although innovation in and expansion of youth mentoring programs are positive trends, the expectations for new program approaches must be realistic, and their results must be carefully evaluated.

In addition to the challenges posed by the idea of mentoring as a “cure-all,” a misguided notion has emerged that because the concept of mentoring is simple—match a young person with a caring adult—creating and sustaining a program must be simple as well. It’s not, and believing that “mentoring is so easy and so inexpensive that anyone can do it” does a disservice to everyone involved in a mentoring program. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, mentoring done poorly has the potential to actually *harm* the young people it aims to serve.

Thus, youth mentoring can be seen as both a promising and a potentially risky intervention. There are many obstacles to implementing effective mentoring programs. From a practical standpoint, collapsing them into specific categories may help in the identification of solutions. For the purposes of this paper, we have identified five categories of obstacles to successful implementation:

1. R – Insufficient resources
2. I – Inadequate infrastructure
3. S – Lack of support
4. K – Limited knowledge of mentoring best practices
5. E – Unclear or unrealistic expectations

These five categories represent the most common obstacles to implementation of any mentoring program, whether community- or school-based, and reinforce the “riske” nature of mentoring. In the following sections, we examine each of these obstacles individually, provide recommendations to address them, and list related questions to consider.

## **Obstacle: Insufficient Resources**

At the heart of youth mentoring programs are the mentors—volunteers who choose to spend their time with young people. In all but the most intensive mentoring models, mentors donate their time. Although many programs offer small stipends for mentors (e.g., to pay for travel or activities), the overall costs for the program are minimal. The result is an expectation by programs, funders, and the larger community that mentoring requires fewer resources than other interventions aimed at young people.

With this expectation in mind, many programs get caught up in the excitement of serving young people and believe that “everything else will fall into place.” They assume that the benefits of mentoring are clear and that if they have a good program, funding can be obtained with little effort.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case. A recent survey found that more than three-quarters of program providers (78.8 percent) identified fundraising as very or somewhat difficult (Saito and Sipe, 2007). More worrisome, over half of these providers were concerned that their programs would have to shrink in size or close altogether because of insufficient funding.

Both programs and funders often underestimate the resources required to sustain an effective program. Well-structured programs that follow best practices compete with less expensive models and struggle to find funding. Less established programs attempt to serve youth without a solid programmatic foundation and may provide ineffective services or discontinue services altogether, potentially harming youth in the process.

Many good programs close their doors every year because of a lack of resources, and in difficult economic times, funding becomes more scarce and competition for funding increases. Funders investing in innovative mentoring approaches must realize that “cookie cutter” outcomes cannot be guaranteed. They must also resist the temptation to mold mentoring to fit into any new initiative that comes along. If a good mentoring program, whether community- or school-based, ceases to exist because it cannot achieve the outcomes required by a specific funding stream, the youth it serves will be left on their own.

In the SBM context in particular, schools are already being asked to do more with less— increase academic performance for their students while providing additional support services, often with few or no additional resources. In this environment, many schools have decided or have been required to develop mentoring programs for their students. Many of these schools are already implementing alternative models such as smaller learning communities that require additional time commitments from staff and sap other resources. With resources of all kinds—money, staff time, space, and equipment—already stretched to the limit, adding another program without careful identification and allocation of resources could be a recipe for disaster.

## **Recommendation: Develop a Realistic Program Budget**

So how much does it really cost to implement a high-quality youth mentoring program? Until recently, it was commonly accepted within the mentoring community that SBM was significantly less expensive to implement than CBM. This may account for the unprecedented growth of school-based programs in recent years, allowing it to surpass CBM as the most common mentoring model.

However, recent research has found the cost of mentoring a youth for 1 year in an SBM setting to be very similar to the costs in a CBM setting: \$987 for SBM and \$1,088 for CBM (Herrera et al., 2007). The most significant components of the program budget were staffing costs—both programmatic (41 percent) and general (26 percent)—and operating costs (27 percent) (Herrera et al., 2007).

Although costs varied significantly across the programs involved in the study—ranging from \$370 to \$1,415 per youth per year—using the average cost for initial budgeting purposes seems a logical place to start. Once a program is up and running, this assumption can be tested so that future budgets reflect actual program costs. Although covering the initial program budget is important, doing so is not enough to ensure the continuation of the program. Creating a sustainability plan is essential and will be discussed in the infrastructure section later in this paper.

It is important to note that the BBBS SBM impact study (Herrera et al., 2007) looked at costs required for community-based organizations (CBOs)—in this case, BBBS agencies—to implement SBM programs in partnership with local schools and school districts. The CBOs were able to leverage school resources, most notably in the form of teacher/staff time and meeting space, to reduce their out-of-pocket expenses by an average of 12 percent or \$117 per student per year (Herrera et al., 2007).

When designing a program, school or school district personnel will have to choose between contracting with a CBO to run the program or running it themselves. In the former situation, the average costs mentioned above can be used in negotiating vendor contracts. In the latter case, many of the resources used will be leveraged from existing sources, requiring the reduction or elimination of other activities. A sample program budget is located in appendix 2.

### **Key Questions to Consider**

Who will provide funding for program start-up? For ongoing operations? What in-kind resources can be leveraged? From whom? Will the program depend on the use of existing staff and other resources (e.g., space and technology)? If so, what are the implications for existing initiatives?

## **Obstacle: Insufficient Resources—Mentors**

Most youth mentoring programs rely heavily, if not exclusively, on volunteers as mentors. In addition, many smaller programs depend on volunteers to carry out the day-to-day management of the program.

Unfortunately, the demand for mentors far exceeds the supply. The shortage of some categories of mentors, including males and minorities, is even more dramatic. In a recent survey by MENTOR (Saito and Sipe, 2007), almost half of all programs said they needed members of a specific race, and more than three-quarters needed mentors of a specific gender. Programs serving populations perceived to be more challenging (e.g., older adolescents) face additional challenges in recruiting volunteers. The inability to recruit, screen, and train sufficient numbers of mentors to meet demands is one of the major barriers to effectively taking youth mentoring programs to scale nationally (Cavell et al., 2009) and limits the impact of individual programs. Although SBM may attract new groups of volunteers who appreciate its structure and supervision, it may also limit working professionals' ability to participate.

## **Recommendation: Create a Mentor Recruitment Strategy and Plan**

Many programs mistakenly believe that recruiting mentors will be easy and underestimate the time and resources required to do mentor recruitment right. A haphazard approach to recruitment is inefficient and ineffective: it leads to long wait-lists, matching delays, and frustration for both youth and staff. In contrast, a well-thought-out recruitment plan provides everyone with a blueprint to follow. An effective plan

- includes clear goals and strategies;
- identifies potential sources of mentors;
- specifies the recruitment message;
- details the staffing, budget, and materials requirements; and
- can be used as a tool to assess the effectiveness of overall recruitment efforts and individual strategies, allowing programs to make ongoing adjustments as necessary.

A sample recruitment plan can be found in appendix 3.

While an in-depth discussion of mentor recruitment is beyond the scope of this paper, remember the following tips:

- **Know the program.** What is the mission? Whom does the program serve? Why is this program important?

- **Understand potential mentors.** What kind of people would make good mentors for the program? What might motivate them to become mentors? What barriers may prevent them from mentoring?
- **Develop a clear message.** Everyone connected to the program should be part of the recruitment team (including staff, mentors, mentees, and parents) and should be able to talk about the program’s mission, goals, and the unique population being served in a simple, compelling manner.
- **Recruit more mentors than you need.** Potential mentors will be lost throughout the enrollment and screening process. Some may decide that mentoring in general, or a certain program in particular, isn’t the right fit for them. Others will be excluded by the program’s screening process. This is a good thing—it is much better to lose a prospective mentor early in the process than after he or she has been matched with a young person. Program administrators should plan accordingly, however, to ensure that they have enough mentors to match with youth.

For more information about mentor recruitment, see appendix 1, Additional Resources.

### **Key Questions to Consider**

What kind of people will make the best mentors for the youth being served? What characteristics are most important? Where/how can you find these types of people? Why should someone volunteer as a mentor for your program? What barriers exist that might prevent someone from volunteering?

### **Obstacle: Inadequate Infrastructure**

A solid infrastructure is essential to the success of any business or nonprofit organization. Unfortunately, based on a variety of factors, including funders’ unrealistic expectations of operational costs, many nonprofits do not spend enough on overhead costs to ensure the long-term stability of their operation (Goggins and Howard, 2009).

Like any nonprofit organization, mentoring programs require a solid foundation and framework to survive and thrive. Many programs are started with the best of intentions but without the organizational capacity needed to make them successful. Six key components of organizational capacity are necessary for high performance and sustainability (Connolly, 2002):

1. strong leadership and governance practices;
2. a clear mission;
3. high-quality program delivery with measurable impact;
4. strategic relationships with constituents and the community;

5. a resource development plan; and
6. efficient internal operations and management of finances, information, and risk.

Without this essential framework, many mentoring programs collapse under the pressure of competing demands and limited resources.

### **Recommendation: Build Program/Organization Capacity**

Fortunately, many of these six components usually exist within the school district or individual school buildings and can be leveraged by the mentoring program. Nonetheless, it is critical that roles, responsibilities, and resources connected to the mentoring program be explicitly included to avoid confusion.

For example, it is not enough to identify the person responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the program. One must also determine how the program fits into the vision, operational structure, and resource development plans for the school or school district. One cannot just assume that the mentoring program will be allowed to leverage existing resources such as technology, data management, or administrative personnel. A clear directive from the principal or school district that explicitly defines which resources the mentoring program may access as well as the process for doing so will avoid confusion and prevent possible turf battles.

Some schools and school districts choose to partner with an existing CBM program to leverage its infrastructure and expertise (see “Obstacle: Limited Knowledge of Mentoring” section of this paper). This is certainly an acceptable strategy—as long as there is a contract or memorandum of understanding that clearly states the roles and responsibilities of each party.

In addition to the general areas of organizational capacity mentioned above, all mentoring programs should develop the following components:

- A sustainability plan to ensure the quality and continuation of the program. For more information on developing a sustainability plan, see *Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities Sustainability Planning and Resource Development for Youth Mentoring Programs* ([http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/476](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/476)).
- A policies and procedures manual that captures how the program operates, including everything from eligibility criteria to match closure. *The Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual*, published by the Hamilton Fish Institute and the National Mentoring Center, provides an excellent customizable template (<http://gwired.gwu.edu/hamfish/merlin-cgi/p/downloadFile/d/20701/n/off/other/1/name/policypdf>).

- A risk management plan that acknowledges, evaluates, and prioritizes risk and identifies strategies to manage risk, including liability insurance. More information about risk management can be found on the Nonprofit Risk Management Center’s website (<http://www.nonprofitrisk.org>).

### **Key Questions to Consider**

Who is responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of the program? What are the key tasks that need to be completed? How much staff time is required to complete those tasks? Will the school run the program alone or will it partner with a CBO? If a partnership is formed, what are the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each partner? What is the chain of command for resolving difficult situations? Who is ultimately accountable for the program? How will program information be collected and maintained to ensure confidentiality? How will the program be evaluated?

### **Obstacle: Lack of Support**

In 2006, as part of its National Agenda for Action, MENTOR declared that “it is time to develop a ‘culture of mentoring’—a culture where mentoring is viewed as integral to the health and well-being of both organizations and individuals.” This declaration underscores the importance of integrating mentoring into the fabric of our society and making the well being of young people everyone’s responsibility.

Unfortunately, mentoring programs often begin as the brainchild of one person or a small group of people. Once the program is underway, it can face apathy or resistance from key stakeholders, including potential volunteers, school or school district personnel, parents, and youth. This lack of ownership for the program transforms the task of running the program from challenging to daunting.

As mentioned in the Lessons Learned section, lack of mentee interest and parent support/involvement are common reasons for the early termination of mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2007)—but even having youth and parental support of a program is not enough. Without larger scale buy-in and support, programs struggle with fundraising, volunteer and youth recruitment, and overall implementation.

### **Recommendation: Involve Stakeholders**

To ensure the success of a mentoring program, one needs buy-in across all levels within the school system and the community at large. The first step to garnering support is inclusion—to engage people in the planning process. Program initiators should form a committee or an advisory board to help design the program. The committee should include representatives from all the key stakeholders in the program, including:

- school district personnel;
- school staff;
- community and business leaders;
- parents; and
- perhaps most importantly, the youth the program will serve.

Program staff should be clear and honest about any constraints (e.g., budget) or nonnegotiable items (e.g., mandatory reporting requirements) affecting the program, but be open to advice, guidance, and suggestions from the group. Giving stakeholders a legitimate voice in the program design results in a sense of empowerment and ownership; people are much more willing to work and fight for something they feel belongs to them.

Although involving stakeholders in program design is important, it is not enough. From a practical standpoint, everyone cannot be included on the program committee, and even those who are included may not be satisfied with every decision that is made.

The effort to win over critics and address resistance requires engagement on a different level. It is important to listen to critiques and try to determine motivations. Why might someone be resistant to the program? Perhaps the person has other priorities and is worried that mentoring could divert resources from those projects or goals. In this case, one must try to find a connection between mentoring and the stated priorities, or, at a minimum, provide assurance that the mentoring program will not compete with the individual's priorities.

Even if some concerns cannot be addressed, it is important to acknowledge them respectfully to prevent resentment and potential sabotaging of the program.

### **Key Questions to Consider**

Whose support and buy-in is necessary for the program to be successful? How will each of these stakeholders be engaged? What role will youth have in program design and implementation? What will the program do to encourage parent/guardian involvement? What potential partners exist within the school, district, or community? How can you work together to leverage resources and better serve youth?

### **Obstacle: Limited Knowledge of Mentoring**

As mentioned earlier, the concept of mentoring has benefited greatly from its simplicity, intuitiveness, and seeming ease of implementation. However, at its heart, mentoring is about creating and cultivating caring relationships between young people and adult, volunteer mentors. Most mentoring programs bring together mentors and mentees

with different backgrounds, cultures, and values—people who would not naturally interact with each other—and ask them to form close relationships.

As one might expect, a number of challenges can arise when “worlds collide and cultures clash.” Even well-established programs with extensive knowledge of best practices struggle to overcome these barriers to success. Many new or inexperienced programs are unprepared for the inevitable obstacles and become overwhelmed trying to deal with them. Lacking knowledge of best practices for mentor screening, training, and support, these programs often confront early match terminations and loss of mentors.

In addition to the potential impact such terminations have on mentees, programs must use additional time and resources to replace the lost mentors, which can potentially lead to staff burnout. Even though almost all programs are driven by a sincere desire to help young people, good intentions are not enough. The potential of mentoring to do harm if done poorly places an enormous responsibility on all programs to understand and incorporate best practices.

### **Recommendation: Learn About Mentoring Best Practices**

A comprehensive discussion of mentoring best practices is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief overview of important findings and resources is provided. Although many programs feel powerless when it comes to fostering effective mentoring relationships, research demonstrates that certain best practices can lead to greater impacts for youth.

One particularly helpful study illuminating best practices was the metaanalysis conducted by DuBois and colleagues. This study examined the results of 55 evaluations of mentoring programs and found that, overall, mentoring programs can have a positive impact (DuBois et al., 2002). Perhaps even more useful for practitioners, DuBois and colleagues (2002) identified specific practices that individually predicted larger positive effects; these are referred to as “empirically based practices”:

- monitoring program implementation;
- selecting an appropriate setting for the mentoring program (programs outside of school showed larger effect sizes);
- recruiting mentors with experience in a helping role or profession;
- setting firm requirements around the expected frequency of mentor/mentee contact;
- providing ongoing training for mentors;
- providing structured activities for mentors and youth; and
- encouraging parental support and involvement.

DuBois and colleagues also identified theory-based practices—practices that had been previously identified in the mentoring literature. These practices did not individually predict greater youth outcomes in the study. However, the researchers found that as the number of best practices (both empirically based and theory based) incorporated by a program increased, so did the impacts for youth. The theory-based practices DuBois and colleagues identified are as follows:

- screening prospective mentors;
- matching mentors and youth based on common interests;
- providing prematch training to mentors;
- establishing clear expectations for the duration of the match;
- supervising the mentor/mentee relationship; and
- offering a support group for mentors.

Having identified what the best practices are, the next challenge is to use them. *The Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (MENTOR, 2009) provides the following six standards to help mentoring programs incorporate best practices into their day-to-day operations:

- **Standard 1.** Recruit appropriate mentors and mentees by realistically describing the program’s aims and expected outcomes.
- **Standard 2.** Screen prospective mentors to determine whether they have the time, commitment, and personal qualities needed to be an effective mentor.
- **Standard 3.** Train prospective mentors in the basic knowledge and skills needed to build an effective mentoring relationship.
- **Standard 4.** Match mentors and mentees along dimensions likely to increase the odds that mentoring relationships will endure.
- **Standard 5.** Monitor mentoring relationship milestones and support mentors with ongoing advice, problem-solving support, and training opportunities for the duration of the relationship.
- **Standard 6.** Facilitate bringing the match to closure in a way that affirms the contributions of both the mentor and mentee and offers both individuals the opportunity to assess the experience.

For each standard, the *Elements* provides specific benchmarks for self-assessment by programs; research-based justifications for the benchmarks; and enhancements to the standard based on the advice of practitioners. A copy of the *Elements* and a checklist to

track the progress of a program can be downloaded at [http://www.mentoring.org/find\\_resources/elements\\_of\\_effective\\_practice](http://www.mentoring.org/find_resources/elements_of_effective_practice).

In addition to these best practices for mentoring as a whole, some promising practices specifically for SBM are beginning to emerge from research and practice. One of the main challenges identified in SBM is the short duration of the match. Program staff should keep this consideration, and the following others, in mind when designing the program:

- Plan to start as many matches as possible at the beginning of the year and adjust the timeline and other activities as necessary.
- Provide ongoing training and support to help mentors build and sustain strong relationships with their mentees.
- Encourage matches to stay together beyond the initial school year and offer opportunities for summer contact between mentors and mentees. Options for summer contact may depend on school district policies, but could include hosting regular group meetings for matches at the school or a community site; organizing community service activities for mentor/mentee pairs; developing a system for phone, e-mail, or postal mail contact; and asking mentors and mentees to keep a journal to share with each other when school resumes.

For more information about SBM, see appendix 1, Additional Resources.

### **Recommendation: Seek Out Expertise**

Having a basic understanding of mentoring is essential for anyone considering starting a program. That does not mean, however, that program staff should expect to become experts in mentoring overnight. Some schools decide to contract with an existing mentoring program to run their SBM program. If this option is chosen, it is important to select a qualified vendor with experience in both mentoring and working with the targeted youth population.

Other schools decide to implement a program on their own. If this route is chosen, it is important to seek out training, technical assistance, and support from mentoring experts. There are a number of national, regional, and local organizations available to support mentoring programs (see appendix 1, Additional Resources).

### **Key Questions to Consider**

Does the program follow best practices for mentoring? Is there someone on staff who has expertise in mentoring? Where can program staff find technical assistance and support?

## **Obstacle: Unclear or Unrealistic Expectations**

The increasing popularity and public support for mentoring and mentoring programs has downsides—more scrutiny of programs and an expectation of immediate, positive results. Although accountability is a good thing, *uninformed* accountability—demanded, perhaps, by funders, policymakers, or citizens without a solid understanding of how mentoring works—undermines the quality of youth mentoring as whole.

For example, greater emphasis is often placed on the number of youth being mentored rather than on the quality of the mentoring provided. Assumptions are often made about the cost-effectiveness of mentoring, causing some programs to cut back on quality in an effort to compete for funds. Even successful programs struggle to balance quality and quantity as they are continually pushed to do more: to serve more youth, or more challenging youth than they are capable of handling, often extending themselves beyond their capacity.

Unlike many other services, there is no economy of scale for mentoring—that is, costs per match do not decrease significantly as the number of matches increases (Herrera et al., 2007; Fountain, 1999). On the other hand, an increased longevity of matches may reduce costs over time because many costs (e.g., recruitment, screening, and training) are incurred upfront. Pressuring programs to continually increase their numbers may force them to dedicate the limited resources they have to making new matches, rather than supporting existing ones. This in turn can result in the need to create even more matches as unsupported matches end prematurely.

Individual mentoring programs can easily fall into this trap. Many programs are started without any clear goal in mind other than “to help youth.” With no clear definition of success, the program often follows the latest funding trend, sometimes promising impacts it cannot deliver. Other programs are started with very specific goals in mind—goals that may be too ambitious. Programs may expect to reap long-term impacts in a short timeframe or to serve large numbers of youth immediately. They may also pursue goals that are beyond the scope of mentoring as a standalone intervention. These programs often fail to realize the potential power of combining mentoring with other support services.

## **Recommendation: Establish Realistic Program Expectations**

From the beginning, program initiators will need to develop clear, reasonable expectations based in part on the program’s unique RISKE (resources, infrastructure, support, knowledge, and expectations) situation. As the goals for the program are considered, initiators should keep in mind the research and lessons learned about the potential impacts of mentoring.

For example, if the only purpose of an SBM program is to increase students’ grade point average, mentoring may not be the best intervention. However, if the goal of the SBM is

to develop a sense of community within the school, with the belief that, over time, the dropout rate will decrease, mentoring may be the answer. If the desired program impacts extend beyond school-related outcomes, the relative importance of those specific outcomes should be evaluated, or a partnership with a CBO to run a CBM program should be considered. Many people find it helpful to create a logic model describing how the program will work. (For more information about logic models, see appendix 1, Additional Resources.)

Once the goals and/or logic model is in place, a timeline for implementation should be developed. Many programs make the mistake of starting a program too soon. A minimum of 4 months (preferably 6) should be allowed from the time planning starts until the program begins. If matching begins in September, staff should begin planning in January to allow extra time for the summer break. A sample timeline from MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice Tool Kit* can be found at [http://www.mentoring.org/find\\_resources/tool\\_kit/design](http://www.mentoring.org/find_resources/tool_kit/design).

Another common mistake for new programs is trying to serve too many youth too quickly. It is much better to start small and gradually take the program to scale than to try to serve everyone the first year and fail. Starting with a small group of youth (25–50 students in the first year) provides the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses within the program's processes and adjust them as necessary. It will also allow the program to more accurately predict future expenses and determine the program's limits (e.g., number of mentors, space).

As the program is designed, a number of critical questions about how the program will work need to be answered. The program outline in appendix 4 offers an example of how one program would answer these questions.

### **Key Questions to Consider**

What are the desired outcomes of the program? Are they realistic given research about mentoring? When are results expected? Who will the program serve (e.g., age, gender)? How many youth will the program serve?

# Conclusions

As an intervention for high school students, mentoring shows promise for success. However, the risk of potential harm to youth and the importance of allocating limited resources efficiently demand vigilance in program design and implementation.

Before starting a mentoring program, a school or school district must carefully examine its unique “risks” profile—resources, infrastructure, support, knowledge, and expectations—to increase the likelihood of success. Research demonstrates that both CBM and SBM can result in positive youth outcomes. In particular, SBM has been shown to reduce truancy, absenteeism, and school-related misconduct and to increase support from peers and nonrelated adults and perceived academic proficiency (Wheeler et al., 2010).

Taken together, these outcomes could lead to a reduction in the dropout rate over time. The stakes are high, but schools cannot afford to miss this important opportunity. We offer a few final suggestions to help ensure the success of SBM programs.

- **Start early.** Allow a minimum of 4 months, preferably 6, to get a program up and running.
- **Plan, plan, plan.** Don’t assume that anything will take care of itself—put everything in writing.
- **Involve everyone.** Designing and implementing a program should be a group effort that brings the school and community together.
- **Start small.** Don’t try to serve everyone all at once. Start small and expand over time as resources and expertise increase.
- **Be realistic.** Expect setbacks. Don’t try to do too much too soon. Don’t promise more than the program can realistically deliver.
- **Analyze results and process.** Assess the program regularly and learn from mistakes.
- **Make adjustments.** Address problems as they arise. Work to continuously improve the program.
- **Celebrate success.** Recognize all achievements, whether big or small, as a way of maintaining morale and motivating everyone to push harder.

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# Appendix 1: Additional Resources

## Logic Models:

- Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities: Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring. [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/180](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/180).
- Logic Model for GirlPOWER! [http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring\\_624.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_624.pdf).

## Mentor Recruitment:

- Effective Mentor Recruitment: Getting Organized, Getting Results. [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/172](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/172).
- Men in Mentoring Toolkit. [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mentormichigan/09\\_MCSC-106\\_MaleRecruitMessaging\\_271677\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mentormichigan/09_MCSC-106_MaleRecruitMessaging_271677_7.pdf).
- Mentoring Across Generation: Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors, *Research in Action Series, Issue 8*, [http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring\\_389.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_389.pdf).

## School-Based Mentoring:

- The ABC's of School-Based Mentoring: Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities. [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/177](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/177).
- Making the Grade: A Guide to Incorporating Academic Achievement into Mentoring Programs and Relationships. [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/205](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/205).
- School-Based Mentoring, *Research in Action Series, Issue 6*. [http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring\\_387.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_387.pdf).

## Training and Technical Assistance:

### National Organizations:

- MENTOR is a national organization that works to expand the power of mentoring. MENTOR hosts the National Youth Mentoring Network, allowing volunteers from around the country to find mentoring opportunities in their communities. The website offers access to a number of mentoring resources, including the *Elements of Effective Practice*. <http://www.mentoring.org>.

- The National Mentoring Center at Education Northwest provides training and technical assistance for youth mentoring programs and initiatives. The website includes a variety of publications and resources. The Center also hosts mentoring forums in which mentoring professionals can ask questions, seek support, and share best practices.  
<http://www.educationnorthwest.org/nmc>.
- YouthFriends Mentoring Institute provides education on recommended best practices for youth mentoring through products, training, and an annual conference. <http://www.mentoringinstitute.org>.

Local/Regional Organizations:

- MENTOR's network of mentoring partnerships includes state and local organizations that promote quality mentoring in their areas through outreach, training, and technical assistance. A complete list of partnerships can be found on MENTOR's website.  
[http://www.mentoring.org/find\\_resources/state\\_partnerships](http://www.mentoring.org/find_resources/state_partnerships).

## Appendix 2: Sample Annual Budget for a School-Based Mentoring Program

Budget Category	Amount
<b>Staff</b>	
Program coordinator*	\$ 30,000
Other program staff*	10,000
<b>Program Expenses</b>	
Program activities/meetings	1,050
Group outings (e.g., transportation, admission)	1,500
Recognition and incentives (e.g., kickoff event, end-of-year celebration, miscellaneous incentives)	1,500
Training	750
<b>Operational Expenses</b>	
Liability insurance*	3,500
Screening/background checks	2,450
Facilities*	500
Public relations	750
Miscellaneous*	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 52,500</b>

\* These items can be leveraged using existing school/district resources and therefore would not necessarily require new funding. However, a reallocation of resources would be required that could affect current programs.

### **Assumptions:**

This sample budget is for a program serving approximately 50 youth and assumes that the school/school district is managing the mentoring program.

### Staff

Program coordinator: includes salary and benefits for one existing school/district employee to serve part time (percentage will vary based on program) as coordinator.

Other program staff: to assist with mentor recruitment, relationship support, and other activities, as needed.

### Program Expenses

Program activities/meetings: includes games, curricula, food, and materials for one activity/meeting per week for 30 weeks of programming.

Group outings/field trips: includes transportation, admission fees, and the like for three group trips at \$500 each.

Recognition and incentives: includes program kickoff event (\$500), end-of-year celebration (\$500), and miscellaneous incentives for mentors and mentees (\$500).

Training: includes materials for mentor training, mentee training, and parent orientation, as well as resources to hire expert trainers as needed.

### Operational Expenses:

Liability insurance: this represents an estimate only. Liability insurance rates vary significantly from state to state. For many schools, the district's insurance policy will cover any program operated by the school. However, if a CBO is running the program, a separate policy is usually required.

Screening/background checks: assumes background checks for 70 potential mentors at \$35 each.

Facilities: includes space, utilities, and so forth. The estimate is based on a percentage of the overall facilities expenses for the school and assumes the program does not require the school to open outside of normal hours.

Public relations: includes marketing materials, registration for volunteer recruitment events, and other marketing expenses.

Miscellaneous: includes office supplies, postage, and similar items.

# Appendix 3: Sample Mentor Recruitment Plan

Goal: Match 40 [insert school name] high school freshmen with adult mentors for the [insert date] school year.

<b>Strategy:</b> <b>Formal presentations at community organizations, religious institutions, and local businesses</b>					<b>Budget:</b> <b>\$750</b>
Source (target audience)	Message	Materials	Goal	Timeline	Staff Responsible
Local church (local community members)	Giving back, investing in youth of community	Recruitment packets, posters, short summary to be include in church newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 requests for more information</li> <li>• 12 applications</li> <li>• Summary in August newsletter</li> </ul>	July	Outreach specialist
Fraternity alumni organization (minority males)	Giving back to community	Recruitment packets (i.e., applications, brochures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 requests for more information</li> <li>• 8 applications</li> </ul>	August	Principal (member of fraternity)
Local bank	Build competent workforce, social responsibility, benefits to employer	Recruitment packets, information on employer/employee benefits of volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 requests for more information</li> <li>• 6 applications</li> </ul>	September	Principal and program coordinator
Seniors group (retired volunteers available during school hours)	Share experience, giving back, benefits to mentors, structure and assistance provided by school (in contrast to CBM)	Recruitment packets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 requests for more information</li> <li>• 4 applications</li> </ul>	September	Program coordinator
United Way volunteer fair (people looking to volunteer)	Impact of mentoring, benefits to mentors	Recruitment packets, giveaways for booth, posters/signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50 requests for more information</li> <li>• 30 applications</li> </ul>	October and May	Program coordinator, mentors and mentees at booth to answer questions

**Strategy:****Budget:  
\$250****Advertise in local media and volunteer networks**

Source (target audience)	Message	Materials	Goal	Timeline	Staff Responsible
Local news daily (local paper)	Get involved—call to action, invest in local community	Short description of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listing in paper once per quarter (pro bono if possible)</li></ul>	December, March, June, September	Program coordinator
VolunteerMatch (online search tool)	Benefits of mentoring, uniqueness of program	Short description of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listing in volunteer database</li></ul>	July, update quarterly	Program coordinator

# Appendix 4: Mentoring Program Outline

Program Overview	
<b>Mentoring Type</b>	<p>What is the structure of the mentoring program? (One-to-one, group/team, peer, etc.)</p> <p><i>Example: One-to-one program matching youth with adult mentors.</i></p>
<b>Goals</b>	<p>What are the (long-term) goals of the program?</p> <p><i>Example: Increase the graduation rate for males at Central High School.</i></p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>What are the objectives of the program? (Note: Objectives should be SMART—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based.)</p> <p><i>Example: Decrease absenteeism among freshmen males by 15 percent. Decrease incidents of misconduct by freshman males by 10 percent.</i></p>
Target population (mentees)	
<b>Characteristic s/ Description</b>	<p>Describe the characteristics of the youth population to be served.</p> <p><i>Example: 50 freshman males.</i></p>
<b>Recruitment and intake</b>	<p>How will youth be identified for and enrolled in the mentoring program?</p> <p><i>Example: An informational flyer will be included in the welcome materials for parents/guardians of all freshmen male students with details on how to enroll their child. Referrals will also be accepted from school staff (e.g., counselors, teachers). Signed parental permission forms are required for participation.</i></p>
<b>Training</b>	<p>How will youth be prepared to participate in the program?</p> <p><i>Example: Youth will be required to attend a 1-hour training/orientation.</i></p>
Mentors	
<b>Characteristic s/ Description</b>	<p>Describe the characteristics of the people who will serve as mentors.</p> <p><i>Example: Adult males, aged 25 and over, preferably from similar socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds as youth.</i></p>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<p>How will you identify mentors with the above characteristics? Where will you go?</p> <p><i>Example: We will build relationships with the mens' groups of local religious institutions and local chapters of fraternal organizations. We will also look to local businesses for prospective mentors.</i></p>

<b>Screening, Intake, and Training</b>	<p>What is the process for screening and enrolling potential mentors? What kind of training will mentors be required to complete?</p> <p><i>Example: All potential mentors must complete an application, provide three references, pass a criminal background check, complete a personal interview, and attend mentor orientation and training. Mentors are required to attend a 3-hour prematch training and a minimum of one 1-hour additional training session.</i></p>
<b>Mentor/Mentee Matches</b>	
<b>Relationship Duration:</b>	<p>How long are mentoring relationships expected to last?</p> <p><i>Example: Minimum of 1 calendar year.</i></p>
<b>Matching</b>	<p>What is the process for matching mentors and mentees? What criteria will be used?</p> <p><i>Example: Mentees will be matched with mentors based on the following criteria: common interests; similar personalities; and preferences of youth, parent, and mentor.</i></p>
<b>Meetings</b>	<p>Describe the match meetings, including their location, length, and frequency.</p> <p><i>Example: Matches will meet once a week for 1 hour. All matches will meet in the library. Matches may meet before school, during lunch, or after school, depending on the schedules of mentors and mentees.</i></p>
<b>Support and Supervision</b>	<p>What kind of support/supervision will be provided to matches? Who will be contracted? How often? By what method?</p> <p><i>Example: A member of the program or school staff will be present during all match meetings. Program staff will meet with each mentee in person once a week for the first 2 months of the match and monthly thereafter. In addition, staff will contact mentors either in person or by phone once a month to discuss the match.</i></p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p>What will the matches do when they meet? Will you provide a curriculum of activities? Will the program sponsor group activities?</p> <p><i>Example: The program will provide mentors and mentees with a list of suggested activities.</i></p>