



## **Research Brief**

### **High School Student Mentoring Programs**

**Question:** Do high school mentoring programs make a difference in student success? What are the components and characteristics of successful programs.

**Summary of Findings:** Perhaps no other intervention in the lives of young people makes as much intuitive sense as the concept of mentoring by caring and competent adults. Fortunately, in the case of high school mentoring, these intuitive good feelings are well supported by research. Students who take part in carefully planned, long-term mentoring programs have higher grade-point averages, are more likely to attend college or post-secondary training programs and report improved social and family relationships. Additionally, these students are less likely to drop out of school, carry weapons, use drugs or engage in other high-risk behaviors. However, good mentoring programs take effort, resources, commitment and a clear understanding of what research tells us about successful mentoring.

#### **Major Findings and Conclusions:**

##### **Models for mentoring students**

✓ **Academic mentoring**

Academic mentoring programs pair students with trained mentors who engage in a supportive relationship based on academic tutoring or enrichment. Equally successful with underachieving students and those with a particular interest they want to explore in greater depth, academic mentors can be a real asset in “differentiating” the curriculum for students with different needs and interests. While the focus is primarily academic, mentors also work with students to develop better self-esteem and achievement motivation. Academic mentoring is very effective and is one of the easiest programs to establish.

✓ **School adjustment mentoring**

School adjustment mentoring programs help students develop the skills and attitudes that are essential to academic success. Mentors might focus on self-esteem, social and behavioral skills and achievement motivation. Mentors encourage good attendance and also serve as advocates when students have problems or concerns. School adjustment mentoring is more time intensive, and mentors need to be well trained and very committed.

✓ **Career mentoring**

Career mentoring involves involving students in experiential situations with practicing professionals and trades people. These experiences may be as simple as providing opportunities to shadow practitioners at their work place or as intensive as internship programs.

✓ **Project based and community mentoring**

Students involved with project based or community mentoring programs work with adults to



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complete projects or help others in their community. These service programs might include building playgrounds, painting houses, tutoring younger children or providing services for the elderly or disadvantaged in their communities.

#### ✓ **Group specific mentoring**

Group specific mentoring programs are designed to partner young people and adults from specific demographic groups. One very successful program pairs young black males with older black professionals, while another involves female scientists mentoring young women. The goal is to provide role models in an effort to encourage under-represented groups to pursue college or specific disciplines.

#### ✓ **Electronic mentoring**

The current popularity of technology and the Internet provide a convenient and cost-effective tool for keeping caring adults connected to young people. In an electronic mentoring program, students and mentors exchange e-mail on a regular basis. These exchanges can be academic in nature, deal with school adjustment issues or simply provide a chance to chat about things that are going on at school or at home. Ideally, electronic mentoring is part of a committed mentoring relationship that includes time spent in face-to-face contact.

#### **Successful Mentoring Programs:**

- ✓ Are well planned and structured to provide high levels of interaction between students and their mentors.
- ✓ Are driven by the needs and interest of students.
- ✓ Are based on clear goals and objectives derived from careful assessment of needs and resources.
- ✓ Include structured activities as well as significant opportunity for informal interaction.
- ✓ Provide support and training for mentors.
- ✓ Provide occasional opportunity for group activities involving students and their mentors.
- ✓ Include an evaluation component designed to engage all involved in a process of continuous improvement.

#### **In the beginning:**

- ✓ Make a careful assessment of needs and resources.
- ✓ Identify key personnel. The most successful programs have a paid coordinator, but many depend entirely on volunteers.
- ✓ Set clear and specific goals.
- ✓ Advertise and promote your program to potential volunteers or supporters using brochures and newsletters.
- ✓ Establish criteria for selecting students and mentors.



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- ✓ Utilize existing groups such as local corporations, universities or military bases when looking for volunteers.
- ✓ Establish procedures for screening and training mentors.
- ✓ Provide some sort of progress report to both volunteers and students.
- ✓ Provide written rules and procedures in the form of a handbook.
- ✓ Be patient. The most effective programs facilitate long term relationships; success does not come easily or overnight.
- ✓ Don't reinvent the wheel unless your situation is truly unique. There are thousands of mentoring programs operating successfully in our nation's schools; most are very willing to share their planning documents, brochures, handbooks and other materials. Several websites designed to share information between programs are included in the resource list below.

#### Online Resources:

##### **The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, *Why Mentoring?***

This site provides excellent material designed to help schools advocate for mentoring program resources. The article reports the results of a study of several long-term mentoring programs and provides a long list of positive outcomes for students and their communities.

[http://www.drugsdontwork.org/cmp\\_whyment.html](http://www.drugsdontwork.org/cmp_whyment.html)

##### **National Mentoring Partnership**

This site provides information and ideas including a link called "Run a Program" that provides the opportunity to network with other providers who are operating mentoring programs similar to yours; find mentoring programs, products, experts, and research; determine best practices for building a sound mentoring program; and pinpoint problems within your mentoring program that may block your effectiveness. <http://www.mentoring.org/>

##### **Michigan Reach Out! Program**

This site lists and describes successful mentoring programs in Michigan schools. Contact information is also provided for exemplary programs that are willing to provide information and support.

<http://www.reachoutmichigan.org/reachout/elsewhere.html>

##### **Sigma XI, The Scientific Research Society**

This site provides excellent training and advice for mentors. While some of the information is specific to mentoring in science, there is enough general information to make this site useful to anyone involved in a mentoring program.

<http://www.sigmaxi.org/programsi/education/men.high.train.shtml>



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#### International Mentoring Association

This site provides information and resources designed to help facilitate successful mentoring programs. While you will be asked to join the site, there is enough information available for nonmembers to make visit worth your while.

<http://www.mentoring-association.org>

#### American Academy of Family Physicians, *Sweet success: Students thrive in mentoring programs*

This article describes a program that matches physicians with able high school students to encourage them to become physicians. The program is established in communities that are facing shortages of physicians and other health care professionals. The goal is to provide “home grown” health care providers in these communities. Some of the ideas could be used for other types of career mentoring programs.

<http://www.aafp.org/fpr/20030400/3.html>

#### Technology Lends Mentoring Programs a Hand

This article describes the Hewlett-Packard Online Mentoring Program that provides students with daily contact with mentors via e-mail. Contact information about the program is provided.

<http://www.centerdigitaled.com/converge/?pg=magstory&id=5672>

#### A mentoring Research Brief

<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/MentoringBrief2002.pdf>

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

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