



# MENTORING FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Education ■ Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Mentoring Resource Center

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## Promoting Academic Achievement Through Your Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) are designed to improve the academic performance of participating youth. Under the Government Performance Reporting Act (GPRA) recommendations for this initiative, 5 percent of participating youth must show improvements in grade-point average in Year 1 of their grant, 15 percent must show improvement in Year 2, and 30 percent in Year 3. Additionally, the percentage of mentored students who have unexcused absences from school must decrease by 10, 30, and 40 percent across the three years of the grant. OSDFS programs are required to work toward meeting these goals and collect data showing results. These objectives also mirror the accountability- and performance-based framework of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB), the law that sets the goals and objectives for elementary and secondary education.

This issue of the *Mentoring Fact Sheet* offers an introductory look at the research on the relationship between mentoring and academics and provides guidance on how your programs can reach these GPRA goals.

### Research on Mentoring and Academic Outcomes

Research shows that mentoring can have a positive effect on academic performance in a number of areas:

- Mentoring has a positive impact on grades and other academic indicators by improving the relationship between the youth and the parent and by boosting the youth's perception of his or her academic abilities (Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch, 2000).

### **Welcome to the Fact Sheet**

*The MRC Mentoring Fact Sheet highlights current knowledge and practices that will help OSDFS mentoring grantees.*

- Several mentoring studies concluded that mentoring had a positive impact on the number of unexcused absences (Tierney, 1995; Aseltine, 1995).
- In addition to its impact on grades and attendance, mentoring also helps boost student attitudes about school (LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, and Taylor, 1996).
- The impact of mentoring can also be felt in other areas in addition to tests and attendance data. Teachers in one study indicated that mentored youth were less likely to be disruptive and more likely to be engaged in what is going on in the classroom (Blakely, 1995).
- In the landmark Big Brothers Big Sisters impact study, some groups of mentored youth were shown to have slight improvement in grades. Results increased for youth who had been mentored longer (Tierney, Grossman, and Resch, 1995).
- Other studies indicated that grades were impacted sporadically for mentored youth (Blakely, Menon, and Jones, 1995) or not at all (Aseltine, Dupre, and Lamlein, 2000).

This research consistently suggests that mentoring can help youth academically in a variety of ways, although more truly experimental research is needed to understand the direct correlation between mentoring program participation and grade improvement. Mentoring program staff need to keep this in mind as they develop specific activities and learning opportunities.

### How Your Mentoring Program Can Support Academic Achievement

OSDFS-funded mentoring program staff can best promote academic achievement in participating youth by:

- **Building strong developmental mentoring relationships.** Mentoring is most effective when structured around a developmental relationship, not a prescriptive one. According to Yarrow and Sykes, 1995, prescriptive mentoring relationships, in which needs of the youth are identified and made the focal point of the match goals and activities, often leave youth and volunteers frustrated while failing to produce the supportive relationship the youth needs. Developmental relationships, which focus on the bond between mentor and youth rather than on “fixing youth problems,” have a much better chance of resulting in desired outcomes.

This means mentoring programs should provide a good balance between relationship-building activities and direct educational support activities, such as tutoring and assisting in homework completion and studying for tests. While it is valuable for a mentor and mentee to engage in academic activities, these activities should leave plenty of room for conversation, friendship, and unconditional support. As Jean Rhodes cautions in her 2000 book *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*, “school-based mentors’ tendency to focus on academics often comes at the expense of the kinds of social activities that help build close bonds.” Build solid mentor-

ing relationships first, and then supplement them with appropriate academic activities.

- **Serving as an advocate for, and connection to, other academic opportunities.** The role of your program (and, by extension, your mentors) is to provide access to educational supports for the youth, both in the school and the community. View your program as facilitator of academic achievement, not the creator of it. In this role, concentrate on building positive developmental relationships that can help the youth connect to other resources, such as:

- Existing tutoring and afterschool programs;
- Libraries (both school and public);
- Teachers (and the content being taught in the classroom);
- Counselors;
- Supplemental educational services the school may provide under *NCLB*;
- Academic clubs (a science club, for example);
- Computer labs;
- Art studios and shop areas;
- Museums;
- Other community educational or cultural institutions; and
- Job shadowing and career exploration opportunities.

Connecting youth with these supports allows your volunteers to concentrate on building those solid developmental *mentoring* relationships. Your mentors can work with youth in a developmental context to provide the specific academic help and support they need while still focusing on building the relationship itself. Just remember that if you want to connect your mentoring program to existing academic services or personnel within the school, you should get the support and permission of the school principal or lead administrator first. Your mentoring program will be most effective if it

is a cooperative effort with the many other services aiming to improve student success in a school. Getting buy-in from school leadership is key to fostering that cooperation.

If you have questions about how to build academic activities and opportunities into your mentoring program, please contact the MRC, which can help you find creative ways to provide youth with access to educational supports. Remember that the improved grades and increased attendance that you must achieve come through a quality mentoring program that builds quality relationships.

*(Other topics related to fostering academic achievement through mentoring, such as connecting mentoring to the school day and tips on tutoring, homework help, and academic goal setting, will be further explored in the upcoming MRC publication Making the Grade).*

## References

- Aseltine, R., Dupre, M., and Lamlein, P. (2000). Mentoring as a drug prevention strategy: An evaluation of Across Ages. *Adolescent and Family Health*, 1, 11–20.
- Blakely, C. H., Menon, R., and Jones, D. J. (1995). *Project BELONG: Final Report*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Public Policy Research Institute.
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- Morrow, K.V., and Styles, M.B. (1995). *Building relationships with youth in program settings: A study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- Rhodes, J., Grossman, J., and Resch, N. (2000). Agents of change: Pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents' academic adjustment. *Child Development*, 71(6), 1662–1671.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2002). *Stand by me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B. and Resch, N.L. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

## Additional Reading and Resources

### Print:

Adams, S.W. (1998). *Developing a school-based mentor program for at risk youth*. Chesterfield, VA: Communities in Schools of Chesterfield.

Caplan, J.G., McElvain, C.K. and Walter, K.E. (2001). *Beyond the bell: A toolkit for creating effective after-school programs*. (2nd ed., rev.). Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Creative Mentoring. (2001). *Elements of Effective Mentoring: A mentor training manual for the in-school mentor*. Wilmington, DE: Author.

Jucovy, L. (2000). *ABCs of School-based Mentoring* [Technical Assistance Packet #1]. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, National Mentoring Center.

Robinson, V. (1992). *Organizing effective school-based mentoring programs*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Partners in Education.

### Additional academic resources on the MRC Web site at:

[www.edmentoring.org/online\\_res1.html](http://www.edmentoring.org/online_res1.html)

### The Mentoring Fact Sheet is published by:

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