



MENTORING FACT SHEET

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

Mentoring Resource Center

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Keeping Mentoring Relationships Going Through the Summer Months

The summer months are a time of concern for educators and youth development professionals, who have historically tried a wide variety of summer programs and enrichment activities to keep youth engaged with learning (and out of trouble) during the break. Since the majority of mentoring programs funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) are based at school sites, program managers must be creative in how they keep matches functioning while dealing with potentially reduced staff, limited access to facilities, and fewer opportunities to supervise matches during the summer months. However, fewer than 36 percent of the 2004 OSDFS mentoring grantees have indicated having a strategy to address this issue on their applications.

The charge of OSDFS mentoring programs is to increase the number of student-mentor matches that are sustained for a period of 12 months by 25 percent in the second year and by 50 percent in the third year. To accomplish this goal, programs need strategies to keep mentoring matches active and connected when school is not in session. This fact sheet examines why offering mentoring over the summer months is so important and gives strategies for keeping mentors and mentees in contact.

Why Mentoring During the Summer Matters

There are areas of research that illustrate the need for keeping mentoring pairs engaged over the summer break.

1. Academic Achievement. The goal for OSDFS mentoring programs is to improve the academic achievement of participating youth, and the summer months have a big impact on student retention.

- A meta-analysis of studies on the impact of the summer break on test scores found that “summer learning loss” equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade-level standardized test scores (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse, 1996).
- The same meta-analysis found that summer learning loss was greatest in math facts and spelling. This is in agreement with other research indicating that factual and procedural knowledge dissipates without practice (Cooper and Sweller, 1987).
- The summer gap seems to affect lower-achieving students the most (Allinder and Fuchs, 1991). This may be due to the effect of decreased learning opportunities for these students at home during the break. Regardless, expect that many of the at-risk students served will be disproportionately affected by the summer gap.
- Educational activities throughout the summer can help retention. A research synthesis found that summer programs that offered remedial, accelerated, or enriched learning had a positive impact on knowledge and skills of participating youth (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck, 2000).

2. Relationship Length and Consistency. The most important reason for making matches that last over the summer months is that the impact of mentoring increases over time. As one researcher notes, “Mentoring may be more like the slow accumulation of pebbles that sets off an avalanche than the baseball bat that propels a ball from the stadium” (Darling, 2005). Research has found that:

- “Youth who were in relationships that lasted a year or longer reported improvements in academic, psycho-social, and behavioral outcomes” (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002).
- The benefits of a nine-month, school-based mentoring program did not last beyond the school year when matches stopped meeting over the summer (Aseltine, Dupre, and Lamelin, 2000).
- Mentoring was most effective when matches were able to fulfill once-a-week meeting requirements. Even regular, consistent telephone contact proved to be associated with improved outcomes (Grossman and Johnson, 1999).

Researcher Jean Rhodes (2002) concluded that suspending services during the summer months “is short-sighted, particularly since program effects tend to accrue with time, and many behavioral problems and difficulties arise during the summer months.” Such research findings provide both motivation (the summer months are important from education and mentoring perspectives) and direction (the value of providing enrichment opportunities) to mentoring program coordinators.

Tips on Offering Summer Services

In some ways, the summer months present the challenge of trying to offer consistent, “normal” mentoring services at a time when business is anything but usual. To design appropriate activities to keep relationships going when school is on break, program coordinators should:

- Take stock of the access they have to resources like meeting space, temporary staff, other school services (summer school, athletic facilities, etc.), community-based learning opportunities, and transportation. Offering “alternative programming” during the summer months depends on what you have access to. Work with your formal program partners and other stakeholders to inventory what’s at your disposal.
- Base decisions on the level of supervision your program can provide and the appropriateness of the activities. Many programs scale back services during the summer months—matches may meet less frequently, or group outings may replace one-on-one time. Regardless, activities should only take place if the program can ensure the safety of participants (your supervision policies do not take the summer off) and if the activities match the goals and nature of the program.

You may wish to adopt some of these additional strategies for keeping matches connected throughout the summer:

- If mentors and mentees will not be meeting as frequently (either because of vacations or program circumstances), mentors can:
 - give paper, envelopes, pens, and several self-addressed, stamped envelopes to their mentees and ask them to send letters, drawings, poems, etc. (mentors should write frequently as well);
 - trade photos with their mentees of each other;
 - talk to their mentees on the phone, when possible; and
 - provide mentees with a notebook to record their summer activities, which can be great icebreakers and conversation starters when they meet in person again with their mentors.
- Consider technology-driven methods of contact. One ED grantee is developing an e-mail-based “message board” where staff can monitor conversations. These should only be considered if proper security and supervision are in place.
- Arrange for matches to meet at the school site during summer school hours.
- Many schools have club and athletic activities during the summer (football, band, orchestra, etc.). Mentors may be able to visit (or even assist) during these times.

- Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCAs have a wealth of activities for youth during the summer months. Ask representatives of these organizations about using their facilities for mentoring time. They may be able to provide supervision, a safe environment, access to other group outings, or help with transportation.
- Take a group field trip to local college campuses, art museums, nature areas, sporting events, or other community-enrichment places.
- Schedule a group basketball or softball game among mentors and mentees (this can be a great parent-involvement piece as well, especially if combined with a picnic).
- Arrange for matches to participate in service-learning activities (group or individual). See the Learn and Serve America Web site for more information on service learning (www.learnandserve.org).
- Have matches help out with fundraising activities for the program (car washes, bake sales, walk-a-thons, etc.). Be sure to follow the fundraising guidelines of your OSDFS grant if doing this type of activity.
- As summer winds down, gather mentors, parents and guardians, and mentees in preparation for the start of normal program services at the beginning of the school year. Hold “get reacquainted” events—and more formal workshops—to prepare everyone for the school year ahead.

Summer can be a great time to expand and enhance both the school’s services and your mentoring relationships. Encourage your matches not just to keep in touch over the summer, but to use the time to explore different activities and have new, enriching adventures.

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