



Increase Mentoring Throughout the State

Supporting Research

Research shows that caring adults play a critical role in the lives of youth. Mentoring is a strategy specifically aimed at providing a caring adult to youth in need. We need more adults and/or peer mentors to take on a mentoring role with youth in order to increase the high school graduation rate in Minnesota. This recommendation calls for actively promoting the value of mentoring relationships through mass media, creating a work release policy allowing public sector employees to more easily volunteer in order to increase the number of mentors statewide, and providing training for everyone involved in mentoring relationships. In addition, it is recommended that a statewide mentoring caucus be created to guide legislation that supports quality mentoring to impact overall graduation rates.

What is the research evidence supporting this recommendation?

Research shows that caring adults play a critical role in the lives of youth, especially youth who are placed at-risk (e.g., homeless, living in poverty, involved with the juvenile justice system, behind in academic credits, highly mobile). A strong base of research supports the efficacy of quality mentoring, including a recent meta-analysis of more than 73 independent mentoring programs that found positive outcomes across social, emotional, behavioral and academic areas of youth development (Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). A robust body of research has shown that structured and informal mentoring relationships are linked with higher aspirations for youth and are tied to complementary benefits on a range of academic and nonacademic indicators (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, & Bass, 2008; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Rodríguez-Planas, 2012; Dang & Miller, 2013). The National Dropout Prevention Center (2016) also identified mentoring as one of the 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on reducing school dropouts. However, more than one in three young people – an estimated 16 million- never have an adult mentor of any kind (structured or naturally occurring) while they are growing up (National Mentoring Partnership, 2014).

The Impact of Mentoring

A study by the National Mentoring Partnership (2014) found that youth with mentors are more likely to report engaging in positive behavior. Young people who had mentors reported setting higher educational goals and were more likely to attend college than those without mentors. High expectations and higher educational attainment are key factors in life success. Young adults who had mentors, particularly those at-risk, were more likely to report engaging in productive and beneficial activities than youth without a mentor, including sports or extracurricular activities, taking leadership positions, and volunteering in communities. The longer the mentoring relationship lasts, the greater the value for youth.

The impact of mentors in a well-structured quality mentor program is boundless and serves as a powerful low-cost, low-tech strategy to help advance the successes of youth in at-risk situations. Mentoring is clearly an effective strategy for keeping students in school. Programs across the nation have an abundance of evidence supporting this fact. For example, the most comprehensive national research evidence from a thorough review of Big Brother/Big Sister programs (Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995) shows excellent results:

- 46% decrease in initiating drug use;
- 27% decrease in initiating alcohol use;
- 38% decrease in number of times hitting someone;
- 37% decrease in skipped classes; and
- 37% decrease in lying to parents.

Another nationwide study reported similar positive results from mentor programs. The Commonwealth Fund's survey (McLearn, Colasanto, and Schoen, 1998) reported the following:

- 62% of students improved their self-esteem;
- 52% of students skipped less school;
- 48% of students improved their grades;
- 49% of students got into less trouble in school;
- 47% of students got into less trouble out of school;
- 45% of students reduced their substance abuse; and
- 35% of students improved family relationships.

The Mentoring Gap for “at-risk” Youth

The National Mentoring Partnership (2014) found that youth considered “at-risk” are simultaneously more likely to have academic struggles and less likely to have naturally occurring mentors, and therefore their immediate mentoring needs could be met through formal mentoring programs. For at-risk youth, the lack of mentoring relationships is likely the result of compounding risk factors including poverty, limited networks, schools with large proportions of high-needs students, and under-resourced communities. In the survey, 37% of at-risk youth report they never had an adult mentor of any kind while they were growing up. In the absence of naturally occurring mentoring relationships, structured relationships can help young people stay on or return to a successful path when they may falter, and help them achieve key milestones on the path to adulthood, such as high school graduation and postsecondary school access and completion.

The State of Mentoring in Minnesota

The research done by Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota (2013) gives us a glimpse of the state of mentoring in Minnesota. Here are some key findings:

- ⇒ Most of the youth served have one or more characteristics deemed to put them “at-risk.” Commonly used risk indicators include living in poverty, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, living in a single-parent household, limited English proficiency, and involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- ⇒ Gender gap: while mentees are roughly evenly divided between males and females, there are almost twice as many female mentors as male mentors. Male youth spend more time on wait lists than females do; on average, 29% of male youth wait one year or more before being matched with a mentor. The most common reason for youth to be on a wait list is a lack of mentors. Nearly half (46%) of the programs said the difficulty meeting their gender match criteria was a top reason for youth to be on a waiting list.
- ⇒ Most mentoring programs serve children between the ages of 5 and 18. Programs for middle-school-age children are the most common, followed by those of high school age. Fewer than a fifth of the programs surveyed serve individuals over 18.
- ⇒ Over two-thirds of mentoring programs have their youth meet their mentors outside of school.
- ⇒ Almost half of programs serve youth living in the Twin Cities Metro region, the East Central region is the next most-common service area. West Central and Northeast Minnesota are least represented by mentoring programs.

Call to Action

Mentoring is needed and wanted by young people – especially at-risk youth – and proven to produce positive outcomes to help them stay on the path to high school graduation, college success, and productive adulthood, and in turn strengthen communities. The mentoring needs of youth who demonstrate the early signs of falling off track to graduate from high school are not being fully met. Mentoring can be a powerful and cost-effective intervention that not only supports youth on their path to high school graduation, but also lifelong success.

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