

Dr. Yvonne W. Brandon, Superintendent, Richmond Public Schools
Excerpts from speech given at the Micah Initiative kick-off event September 11, 2008

Richmond Public Schools has made such great strides in student achievement because of dedicated teachers, parents, hard-working students and community partnerships like the Micah Initiative.

I love you for making an assessment of your time and devoting it to children.

You are as good as your word, you live out your mission, and you provide a caring service to your community and most especially to the RPS family.

Currently, more than 700 Micah volunteers representing more than 75 faith-based communities are working with students in 24 Richmond City public schools.

Now that's really something to feel righteous about – and to shout about – and to give thanks for and glory to those who serve because of the immeasurable impact.

Simply put, the Micah Initiative is a wonderful commitment, and a terrific hands-on partnership that provides very real, very concrete and – most importantly – long-lasting academic benefits.

Indeed, my hope is that your numbers will expand. In fact, my wish is that every child in need has a caring adult to talk to, to trust, to depend on.

That every one of our students has someone to offer praise in times of joy and achievement and guidance in moments of confusion and despair.

Now I know some will say this is a pipe dream; but it doesn't have to be - especially if you will continue your involvement and then share your story with others.

So please tell all who will listen – and even those who may initially turn a deaf ear – that mentors imbue students with hope and positive decision-making skills.

That mentors teach students and model for students that knowledge and education arm you for life; not drugs or guns.

The mentor's voice – your voice – tells young people that they can succeed and move forward to a better life and not feel trapped and doomed to failure.

Friends, it's really not very complicated. In fact, study after study proves that young people who meet regularly with their mentors are less likely to use drugs, less likely to skip school and are more trusting of parents and guardians and more likely to be successful.

Think about that. No big budget is involved. No gathering of a think tank is required. Simply one caring adult investing time in a young person.

That's what you do as a Micah volunteer. And for that, I applaud and thank you.