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# research

## in action

School-Based Mentoring

perspective evidence change  
youth productive opportunities  
nurture support research  
enhance potential  
research youth development  
outcomes build support  
engage productive youth  
strengths nurture perspective  
opportunities support youth  
strengths



## About the Research in Action Series

### Overview

Last year, MENTOR released the *National Agenda for Action: How to Close America's Mentoring Gap*. Representing the collective wisdom of the mentoring field, the *Agenda* articulates five key strategies and action items necessary to move the field forward and truly close the mentoring gap. In an effort to address one of these critical strategies—elevating the role of research—MENTOR created the Research and Policy Council, an advisory group composed of the nation's leading mentoring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

In September 2006, MENTOR convened the first meeting of the Research and Policy Council with the goal of increasing the connection and exchange of ideas among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to strengthen the practice of youth mentoring. The *Research in Action* series is the first product to evolve from the work of the Council—taking current mentoring research and translating it into useful, user-friendly materials for mentoring practitioners.

With research articles written by leading scholars, the series includes ten issues on some of the most pressing topics facing the youth mentoring field:

- Issue 1: Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development
- Issue 2: Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices
- Issue 3: Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention
- Issue 4: Fostering Close and Effective Relationships in Youth Mentoring Programs
- Issue 5: Why Youth Mentoring Relationships End
- Issue 6: School-Based Mentoring**
- Issue 7: Cross-Age Peer Mentoring
- Issue 8: Mentoring Across Generations: Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors
- Issue 9: Youth Mentoring: Do Race and Ethnicity Really Matter?
- Issue 10: Mentoring: A Promising Intervention for Children of Prisoners

## Using the Series

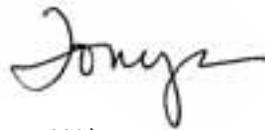
Each issue in the series is designed to make the scholarly research accessible to and relevant for practitioners and is composed of three sections:

1. **Research:** a peer-reviewed article, written by a leading researcher, summarizing the latest research available on the topic and its implications for the field;
2. **Action:** a tool, activity, template, or resource, created by MENTOR, with concrete suggestions on how practitioners can incorporate the research findings into mentoring programs; and
3. **Resources:** a list of additional resources on the topic for further research.

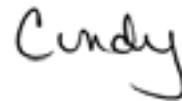
As you read the series, we invite you to study each section and consider what you can do to effectively link mentoring research with program practice. Please join us in thanking the executive editor, Dr. Jean Rhodes, and the authors of this issue, Drs. Michael Karcher and Carla Herrera, for graciously contributing their time and expertise to this project.



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## School-Based Mentoring

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Over the last ten years, mentoring has seen unprecedented growth. This has been particularly noticeable in school-based mentoring (SBM), a relatively new form of mentoring that brings mentors into schools to meet with students. A national poll conducted by MENTOR (2006) estimated that close to 870,000 adults are mentoring children in schools, and this estimate does not include the thousands of high school-aged volunteers currently mentoring in schools.

SBM is now the most common form of formal mentoring in the U.S., surpassing traditional community-based mentoring (CBM). Its growth, however, has outpaced the research necessary to determine whether and how the program works (Portwood & Ayers, 2005). Recent studies have begun to outline some of the model's strengths and challenges. Results from these studies support three main conclusions: 1) SBM is a very different intervention from the traditional CBM model; 2) the approach does benefit participating youth, primarily in peer relationships and other school-related areas; and 3) several practices may be crucial for maximizing youth benefits.

### School-based and Community-based Approaches to Mentoring

Although the underlying goal of SBM and CBM is the same (i.e., providing at-risk youth with supportive relationships), the school context provides matches with opportunities not available in CBM, and, at the same time, places constraints on relationship development that are not present in CBM. These differences yield different match experiences and ultimately contribute to the somewhat distinct, context-specific impacts.

One potential strength of SBM is the fact that staff can supervise matches at the school, and thus involve groups of mentors not typically utilized in CBM, such as high school and college age mentors who may prefer or require the additional structure of the school context and on-site supervision (Karcher, 2005b). Additionally, because teachers nominate students for the program, SBM can reach children whose parents might not have the resources necessary to seek out mentoring services for their children (Herrera, 1999).

The school context may also provide mentors with salient opportunities to influence school-related outcomes. For example, the mentor's presence may provide youth an incentive to come to school more often and a disincentive to misbehave in this context. Some school-based mentors may even become a voice or advocate for the child at school (Herrera, 1999).

Finally, in contrast to CBM, SBM match meetings often occur in the presence of peers. We know very little about the effects of this meeting format. These peer interactions (or peers' reactions to a classmate's being assigned a mentor) could inhibit the match from engaging in interactions that could add depth to their relationship, as we suspect may occur more often among older mentees. Or, peer interactions could provide the mentor with valuable insights into the child's social skills and relationships as well as opportunities to scaffold the child's peer-related development. Additionally, when a child's peers observe her being valued and appreciated by a mentor, it may influence how those peers view the child. There is some evidence of this, especially in elementary schools (see Hughes & Cavell, 2004). In fact, as we discuss below, improvements in peer relationships, support, and connectedness appear to be some of the key outcomes of SBM.

Yet, in addition to the potential benefits of this context, the school setting also places several constraints on SBM meetings not experienced in CBM. Class schedules tightly limit the time matches can spend together, and the summer schedule, as well as other holidays, impose pauses in relationship development that do not occur in the lives of CBM matches. The school context also does not allow mentors to engage in the types of activities that could contribute to CBM's success—for example, connecting the child to the surrounding community or providing an escape from a difficult home environment. The school also provides far fewer opportunities for playful activities than does mentoring in the community. There is longstanding evidence (Goodman, 1972) that more active mentoring relationships yield bigger impacts than those based primarily on discussion. In schools, and increasingly between elementary and high school, opportunities to engage in physical activities become fewer and harder to find (Karcher, 2007a).

Despite these differences, costs for SBM and CBM programs are very similar—about \$1,000 per match per year (Herrera et al., 2007). But there is considerable variation across programs. Some of this variation is due to differences in child-to-staff ratios (i.e., the more children served per staff member, the less expensive the program) (Herrera et al., 2007). Some may also reflect the fact that programs working with youth with greater needs typically require more staff and resources. For example, the *Friends of the Children* program in Portland, Oregon is relatively expensive because it pays mentors to work with children for four hours a week. Each paid mentor works with a small number of children; thus, the program's child-to-paid mentor ratio is relatively low, making it much more costly than the average SBM program. Yet, the program also serves a population of youth at much greater risk and over a significantly longer period of the child's life than most SBM programs. This example highlights the fact that costs must be weighed with the type of services being provided and the population being served when determining a program's potential value. SBM's costs and benefits have yet to be examined by researchers in this way.

Similarly, cost assessments of SBM have not yet considered how many hours of mentoring the child receives for every dollar spent. SBM and CBM programs both cost about \$1,000 per child per year. However, relative to youth involved in CBM, youth in SBM programs receive much “less” mentoring (i.e., fewer hours of mentoring) per dollar per year of mentoring. Thus, despite their similar annual cost, SBM is a much more expensive program *per hour*. Yet, it is difficult to ascribe a value to the content of a given hour in these programs. For example, it is possible that an hour in SBM is much more focused and productive than a given hour in CBM, simply because the mentor and youth know that they have very little time together, so they use it more wisely. In other words, a given hour in these two very different programs may have very different values, making a direct comparison of “total time together” potentially misleading. Considering the outcomes yielded for a given price is likely a better strategy. Recent data on outcomes combined with cost data (Herrera et al., 2007) will enable researchers to begin to assess whether, dollar for dollar, SBM yields comparable benefits to CBM and other programs for youth—a crucial next step in understanding the program’s true cost.

## SBM Outcomes

Until recently, most SBM studies have been conducted using non-experimental or quasi-experimental methods (see Portwood & Ayers, 2005; Rhodes, 2005). In their meta-analysis of 55 mentoring program effectiveness studies, DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) found similarly “small” effects for SBM, CBM, and other mentoring programs. The results from several studies since then suggest that SBM does indeed provide youth with important benefits that are comparable in size to those achieved in CBM but considerably smaller than those yielded from counseling interventions. In particular, two recent, large-scale random assignment impact studies have provided the field with rigorous evidence that the program works. These benefits are mostly in school performance, attitudes, and behavior, as well as peer relationships.

### *The Big Brothers Big Sisters SBM (BBBS SBM) Impact Study* (Herrera et al., 2007)

This study, conducted by Public/Private Ventures, involved ten BBBS agencies nationwide and 1,139 youth in 4th through 9th grades, attending 71 different schools. About 80 percent of the youth received free or reduced-price lunch and/or lived in a single-parent home; and 77 percent were having difficulties in at least one of four areas of risk assessed (i.e., academic performance, school behavior, relationships, and youth-reported misconduct). After the first school year of program involvement, during which youth received an average of about five months of weekly mentoring, teachers reported that participating youth improved more than their non-mentored peers in several aspects of their school performance and behavior (e.g., overall performance, quality and number of assignments turned in, skipping school, serious school infractions). Participating youth also felt more confident in their scholastic abilities. The size of these benefits was modest, although almost identical to that reported for the BBBS CBM program (Tierney,

Grossman, & Resch, 1995). However, BBBS SBM benefited youth in only school-related outcomes; whereas BBBS CBM affected a much broader set of outcomes, including initiation of drug and alcohol use, and parent relationships.

Yet, unlike the BBBS CBM study, the BBBS SBM evaluation included a six-month follow-up assessment to test the durability of these changes. Similar to those few studies that have included an additional follow-up beyond the typical program dosage (e.g., Aseltine, Dupre & Lamlein, 2000), most of these SBM outcomes were not sustained into the first half of the second school year of the study, when about half of the youth were no longer receiving mentoring.

#### *The Communities In Schools (CIS) Study of Mentoring In the Learning Environment (SMILE) Impact Study (Karcher, 2007b)*

In this study, the effect of providing youth SBM, in addition to other school-based support services, was examined with a sample of 516 predominately Latino(a) students in grades 5 through 12 attending 19 schools. Participants in the multi-component intervention run by Communities in Schools of San Antonio were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) supportive services alone; or (2) supportive services plus SBM. Therefore, unlike the BBBS SBM study described above, the CIS SMILE study examined the “additive” effect of providing a school-based mentor to youth who were already receiving other services, such as tutoring, group counseling, and enrichment activities.

The duration of the SBM relationships in the CIS SMILE study were brief (typically eight meetings across three months), partly because the agency experienced barriers to retaining mentors. Relative to those youth who were not mentored, youth who were randomly assigned to receive a mentor improved in their self-reported connectedness to peers, self-esteem (global and present-oriented), and social support from friends. Other studies also have noted improvements in peer relationships (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Herrera, 2004; King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002) as well as in attitudes toward or about oneself (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Karcher, 2005c; Portwood et al., 2005; King et al., 2002). The SMILE study did not find impacts in several other areas, including grades and attendance. The size of the program effects in this study also were small.

#### *Who Benefits the Most?*

Understanding which youth receive bigger benefits from SBM is important for programs in that these differences could be used to help determine which youth should receive a school-based mentor (versus a community-based mentor or some other intervention) or how to improve services for particular groups of youth. Additional analyses from the SMILE study, for example, suggest that the age and sex of the mentee may play an important role in determining potential benefits of the program. Compared to their peers who received other support services alone, the elementary school (5th grade) Latino

boys and high school Latina girls benefited most. The 5th grade boys who were mentored reported better social skills (empathy and cooperation) and higher levels of hopefulness and connectedness both to culturally different peers and to school. The high school girls reported greater connectedness to culturally different peers, self-esteem, and support from friends.

Earlier, we discussed the fact that because SBM takes place around the youth's peers, the youth may experience a boost in social status as a result of positive peer impressions of having a mentor (Herrera, 1999). However, these same processes may work against positive effects for different age groups or genders. The nature of peer relationships changes as children move from elementary to middle and then to high school. Emerging cognitive skills may allow teens to anticipate the way others are thinking about them in ways children cannot (Selman, 1980). This may help explain why, in the P/PV (BBBS SBM) study, when youth were asked when they applied how excited they were to have a mentor in the program, they expressed significantly less excitement as they progressed from elementary to middle to high school. Having a mentor may simply mean different things for younger and older youth or for girls versus boys. Herrera et al. (2007) reported that girls seemed to benefit slightly more than boys. Mentoring may be viewed more as a "helping relationship" than a "social opportunity" among older youth, and there is evidence that girls are more receptive than boys to receiving such services (Weisz et al., 1995). These processes suggest that programs may need to find creative ways to ensure that having a mentor is viewed by all students as a privilege and a rewarding opportunity rather than a corrective treatment about which older mentees might feel embarrassed.

Other studies provide additional hints that the program may be more beneficial for particular groups. For example, youth performing better academically at the start of their program involvement seemed to benefit slightly more than those who were struggling academically (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2004). It may be that mentors of academically struggling mentees feel compelled to intervene and assist with academics, which may diminish the effectiveness of the mentor. As youth move from elementary into middle and high school, there is an increasing emphasis among mentors on making academic and behavioral improvements and less emphasis on relationship development (Karcher, 2007c), which may heighten older youths', and especially academically underachieving adolescent mentees', likelihood of feeling that mentoring is a remedial rather than a social activity.

In short, while there is limited research on differential effects of SBM, the data that are currently available suggest that not all youth benefit in the same ways. These findings should not imply that programs should stop serving those youth receiving the smallest benefits, but rather that program staff may have to put more thought into developing program models that fill the needs of those youth who are not yet getting from their participation as much as they could. For example, the fact that the SMILE study found no positive effects of SBM for high school boys suggests that it is worth considering

what other developmental processes might need to be considered to help programs meet teenage boys' unique needs, such as for decision-making, direct involvement, and opportunities for receiving peer approval. In response to their perceived limited effectiveness with high school boys, one program in the Norfolk Public Schools, changed its approach to directly involve teenage boys in designing their program, determining how they will use their time with the mentors, and identifying what they want to get out of the program (R. Royster-Davis, personal communication, July 17, 2007).

*The Friends of the Children* program, described earlier, is considering initiating another innovative approach to addressing unique demographic and developmental needs of youth. This program, which follows youth from kindergarten through high school, is piloting a change that would provide new mentors to youth as they reach adolescence. This, they hope, will facilitate new excitement in the program, provide new opportunities for learning, and create matches for youth with mentors who are particularly skilled at relating to adolescents. This program's provision of long-term intensive mentoring for very high-risk children also exemplifies the idea that SBM is not a one-size-fits-all program—different children may benefit from different types of mentoring, and programs may need to think carefully about the “fit” of their program with the particular characteristics and developmental needs of the children they serve.

## Characteristics of Effective Programs

The programs involved in the BBBS SBM study (Herrera et al., 2007) were quite diverse in the characteristics and experiences of individual matches (e.g., mentor age, activities, and meeting format) as well as the program practices supporting these matches. This flexibility is one of the strengths of the program and part of what makes SBM so attractive to schools. However, it also suggests that programs may not yet have a clear set of guidelines for which aspects of the program can be tailored to the school's needs, and which should not. This section describes program practices that we believe make important contributions to SBM benefits.

### *Mentor Support*

Training and support from the agency is just as important in SBM as in CBM. Herrera et al. (2007), for example, report that those mentors who reported higher levels of staff support and helpfulness and receipt of more training (pre-match and ongoing) felt closer to their mentees and were more likely to carry their match over into a subsequent school year than those mentors who received less support. Karcher (2005a) similarly found that mentors who reported more contact with CIS case managers at the school felt more important, felt they benefited more from being mentors, and viewed their relationships more positively than those mentors who had little staff contact. Although some of this contact with agency staff occurs during training, equally important may be the availability of agency staff on the ground, in the school, on a regular basis who can, perhaps, serve as a resource for the mentor and provide encouragement. These associations between staff support and mentors' experiences do not necessarily mean that receiving support

causes positive mentor outcomes. For example, it may be that those mentors who are most satisfied are also the same mentors who make the extra effort to seek out case manager support. However, these associations do provide hints that support is important in fostering positive mentor experiences.

However, although the school setting has some potential advantages in terms of support, such as providing more frequent access to agency and school staff, and offering a convenient place for mentor supervision to occur, it also poses unique challenges. For example, in many after-school programs staff are present for all match meetings. This set-up may encourage staff to feel that their presence is, in itself, sufficient support. Yet, without frequent one-on-one communication, mentors may not be getting the support they need. In the BBBS SBM study, many mentors who had access to staff did not necessarily report high levels of communication with them. In fact, 12 percent of mentors reported that they had never communicated with BBBS or school staff for support or advice. This suggests that program and school staff need not only to be present but also need to actively ensure that they seek out mentors to provide them with the support and supervision they need.

School support is also essential. Mentor reports suggest that communication with school staff and adequate access to resources and space at the school are linked with both match quality and longevity (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005a). Programs need buy-in from the schools they work with and can help achieve this by involving the school in setting the goals, location for meetings, and activities for the matches, while of course, relying on best practices to set these standards.

One important final note on staff support is that different types of school-based mentors may require unique forms of programmatic support. For example, recently the field has experienced an increase in the use of older students as SBM volunteers. Cross-age peer mentors—typically high school students who mentor elementary or middle school students—now constitute almost half of the volunteers mentoring in schools through BBBS. It is likely that these mentors need additional and different types of support than that typically provided to adults and this support should be tailored to their developmental needs (see Karcher, 2005b; Lakes & Karcher, 2005). For example, to keep cross-age mentors focused on their mentees (as opposed to their peers) when they meet in a group format, considerable structure may be necessary, whereas for adults, this structure may not be needed. Given that college students are often just one or two years older than high school-aged mentors, college student volunteers also likely need more direction, training, and supervision.

### *Types of Activities*

Activities fuel the match and, in some ways, contexts drive the activities. As noted earlier, there are ways that the school context can invite the wrong kinds of activities—namely those focused directly on improving academic performance, which increase at each school level. Overly focused, mentor-driven, goal-directed activities, specifically those

selected by the mentor which emphasize the need for the youth to make improvements in academics, behavior, or attendance have negative associations with match quality, duration, and outcomes (Karcher, 2004, 2007a). Activities that reflect the mentors' goals for the youth and which are experienced by mentees as heavy handed are *prescriptive activities* and work against relationship success (Morrow & Styles, 1995). However, when activities are selected by the youth and are directed toward leveraging changes important to the youth, then such activities are simply instrumental tools—hence the term, *instrumental activities* (Karcher et al., 2006). In schools, it can be difficult to distinguish between prescriptive and instrumental activities, unless the mentor and mentee agree about the purpose and goals of their relationship. While some have argued that instrumental activities are more appropriate for older youth, especially in workplace youth mentoring where the youth are seeking specific skills (Darling, 2005; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004), the school context seems to heighten the use of activities and discussions about school and behaviors. This increases the likelihood that such activities are not youth-driven.

Although instrumental activities are not the focus of most SBM meetings, SBM mentors report engaging in academic activities more frequently than CBM mentors (Herrera et al., 2000), perhaps because these activities seem more relevant to the school context. They also tend to occur at higher rates in later grades (Karcher, 2007c), which may explain the limited effects of SBM for high school boys in the SMILE study. In the SMILE study, the percentage of time the boys' mentors spent discussing academics, the child's behavior, and attendance was three times greater in high school (21 percent) than in elementary school (7 percent) matches. This also may explain why high school students in the BBBS SBM study reported being less interested in having a mentor than did elementary or middle school students. Having observed that SBM is fairly academically focused in high school, SBM may be viewed by youth more as a consequence for underachievement than as a special opportunity for social interaction with an adult.

*Developmental activities*, which emphasize getting to know youth, having fun, and engaging in activities of interest to youth, have long been linked with match longevity and satisfaction in CBM (Goodman, 1972; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Grossman & Rhodes, 2000). There is also compelling evidence from both a large-scale study of BBBS and the SMILE study that developmental activities (e.g., sports, creative activities, and indoor games), are associated with positive outcomes in SBM (Hansen, 2005; Karcher, 2007a). Unfortunately, in the SMILE study, the use of developmental activities in elementary match meetings (30 percent) was three times greater than in high school (10 percent) matches. As in CBM (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004), it is not clear how much of a balance between instrumental and developmental activities is best, and there is some evidence that SBM matches that are able to enlist developmental activities early on to establish rapport and connection are then able to utilize instrumental activities more effectively later in the relationship (Karcher, 2007a).

### *Increasing Longevity*

Practices that help to create longer matches (e.g., more support and training) are important in both CBM and SBM because longer matches are associated with stronger benefits. Unfortunately, the school calendar constrains meeting times in several ways: SBM meetings typically do not occur on weekends or holidays; the programs usually start a month or two into the beginning of the school year (due to the time required for recruiting, training, and matching youth and mentors); and matches usually stop meeting before the summer begins, sometimes temporarily but often permanently, potentially resulting in vague match closures. Many programs also start matches throughout the school year, which further constrains the available meeting times. As a result, in SBM, a “school-year match” is typically much shorter than the full nine months of a school year. Both the BBBS SBM and CIS SMILE study (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher 2007b) reported that during the first school year of program involvement, matches met five or fewer months on average. To lengthen SBM matches, it is crucial to match youth as early in the school year as possible. Similarly, because not all children will be at the same school year after year, to preserve matches for multiple years, programs should start matches with younger youth within a particular school (i.e., prior to the last year before their transition; e.g., 4th and 7th grade rather than 5th or 8th grade). Agencies should also try to establish programs or connections with other programs in feeder schools to help ensure that youth continue to receive mentoring despite school transitions, which can be very difficult for youth, and may represent a particularly important time for youth to experience stable relationships.

### *Terminating Effectively*

The low rates of continuing second-school-year matches with returning mentors in both the BBBS SBM and CIS SMILE study suggest that one-school-year matches are often the norm in SBM. Often matches must end before the end of the school year or at the end of a school year, and mentors should be well-trained in how to terminate or close their matches effectively. The end of the match is a crucial stage in its life. Yet, programs typically focus very little attention on this stage or on training mentors to help youth leave their match feeling positive about its ending. Doing so requires that programs establish procedures for closure, train mentors on their importance, and then help mentors to consistently implement these procedures. As one example, some programs close all matches at the end of the year to curtail the disappointment that youth can experience when their mentors don’t return for a second year. The mentors may return the next year to be rematched, but this is not the expectation. Given the potential for harm when matches are not closed effectively, *effectively closing* matches is an especially important program practice in SBM. In fact, poor or unclear terminations may be one contributor to the limited effects of short matches. This is a topic researchers have yet to explore, but will be crucial as we continue to try to understand the importance of longevity.

### *Summer Contact*

Summer contact between mentors and their mentees may be another important way to increase match longevity and quality. In SBM mentors, including programming during the summer break between school years is uncommon, in part because SBM mentors typically undergo less screening than CBM mentors, raising potential concerns over liability during the summer months when matches cannot be closely supervised at school. Yet, ensuring that matches communicate during this period may be a crucial ingredient in highly effective programs. In the Herrera et al. (2007) study, very few BBBS SBM matches communicated over the summer. Those matches that did were more likely to carry over into the following school year and lasted longer in that school year. They also showed more improvements in relationship quality from the previous spring than those matches without summer contact.

There are limits to the kind of off-campus interactions that school-based mentors can be allowed to have with their mentees over the summer, unless school-based mentors are screened as thoroughly as community-based mentors; in most programs, they are not. However, summer communication does not have to involve unsupervised face-to-face meetings and could include a variety of components, such as:

- Holding agency-sponsored summer activities which staff could supervise (perhaps surveying matches in the spring to get their schedules and ideas for potential activities);
- Holding a spring party to encourage matches to stay in touch by phone, letters or email over the summer, discuss ideas for how to do this, and ensure that mentors tell youth if they will not be able to maintain contact with them, and why;
- Providing matches with ideas for games and activities they could engage in by phone, email or letters; and
- Sending out summer newsletters as a way to keep mentors and youth connected to each other through their connection with the agency.

Lacking this “bridge” between school years can invite self-doubt and anxiety among youth who don’t know what to expect next, either for the summer or the next fall. In the BBBS study, most mentors reported that they wanted to communicate with their mentees during the summer (and felt that their mentees did as well). It was the program, agencies, and schools that more often lacked the commitment or ability to support summer communication. Programs need to focus more attention on this relatively neglected component of SBM.

## Conclusion

School-based mentoring is an adaptation of the traditional mentoring model for schools. Involving schools can help programs reach large groups of youth who may not otherwise be served, but school-based programs and their matches must adjust to the structure of the school. The available research suggests new and additional mentor training, staff support, and match maintenance efforts, such as summer contacts, will be necessary if SBM is to maximize its potential. There also is some evidence that the school poses unique constraints on mentoring that may interact with developmental and gender norms to make it more effective for some youth than others. Adapting school-based mentoring in ways that better suit the specific needs of boys and girls of different ages will be an important next step in the realization of potential benefits of this rapidly growing approach to promoting positive youth development.

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## School-Based Mentoring

School-based mentoring has undergone a dramatic expansion in recent years. Yet, research is only beginning to reveal the promise and potential of this unique type of mentoring. In their article, Drs. Herrera and Karcher use findings from the latest empirical research to offer important insights into the characteristics of effective school-based mentoring programs and their unique benefits. This action section uses a quiz format to test practitioners' knowledge of effective school-based mentoring practices. Part I of the quiz provides individuals who are thinking about starting a mentoring program an opportunity to determine if school-based mentoring is the right fit given their resources and desired youth outcomes. Part II of the quiz allows current program staff to assess how closely their practices resemble those of an effective school-based program.

### Part I: Is a School-Based Mentoring Program Right for You?

The choice to start a school-based mentoring program should not be made lightly. This quiz will test your knowledge about the unique program considerations and practices that can help school-based mentoring yield positive outcomes for youth.

Once you have finished taking part I of the quiz, use the answer sheet to assess whether this type of mentoring is the best fit to achieve the desired outcomes with available resources.

#### *Circle all that apply*

1. What school level do you plan to serve in your program?
  - A. Elementary school
  - B. Middle school
  - C. High school
  
2. What outcomes do you want to foster in your mentees?
  - A. School-related improvements
  - B. Better relationships with parents
  - C. Reduced likelihood of starting risky behavior outside of school (e.g., initiation of drug and alcohol use)

3. What types of activities will your mentors and mentees do together?
  - A. Homework/Tutoring
  - B. Activities/Games
  - C. Talking/Hanging out
4. How long will your program make significant efforts to sustain the matches?
  - A. 3 months
  - B. 9 months (1 school year)
  - C. 12 months or longer

*True or False*

5. I am starting a school-based mentoring program because it is cheaper to operate than a community-based mentoring program.
6. I am starting a school-based mentoring program because it does not require the same intense screening for mentors as community-based mentoring programs.

**Part II: Is Your School-based Mentoring Program Effective?**

If you currently operate or have developed a model for a school-based mentoring program, this quiz can help you assess the potential effectiveness of your program. For each multiple choice question, circle one answer. Using the answer sheet in the next section, add up your score and review the recommendations for improving your program's effectiveness.

1. In my program, mentors receive:
  - A. No initial or ongoing training.
  - B. Initial training but no ongoing training.
  - C. Initial and ongoing training.
2. When matches meet in my program:
  - A. Staff leave the room.
  - B. Staff remain present in the room.
  - C. Staff actively engage with mentors and matches to supervise and monitor the relationships.

3. Mentors talk with school staff:
  - A. Never
  - B. Sometimes
  - C. Regularly
  
4. Mentors in my program:
  - A. Focus every mentoring session on improving the academic performance of the mentee.
  - B. Balance 50% school work with 50% fun activities in an effort to “mix up” goal-directed and relationship-based activities during the mentoring sessions.
  - C. Work with mentees to mutually decide what activities to do together—sometimes these are academic and sometimes they are not—depending on the wants and needs of mentees.
  
5. My program matches youth with mentors:
  - A. At the end of the school year
  - B. In the middle of the school year
  - C. At the start of the school year
  
6. Over the summer, for matches that plan to continue beyond the first year:
  - A. Mentors and mentees will be allowed to stay in touch in whatever way they like.
  - B. Mentors and mentees will be encouraged by the program to remain in contact over the summer months. However, we do not offer resources or guidelines for these meetings.
  - C. My program provides resources for matches to continue communicating via email, phone, letters, or in person over the summer months.

## Answer Sheet

### Part I: Is School-Based Mentoring Right For You?

#### Multiple Choice

1. What school level do you plan to serve in your program?

**Answer: A, B, and C.** All three answers demonstrate that elementary, middle, and high school students can benefit from school-based mentoring programs. However, it is important to note that age and gender may play a role in determining the type and degree of youth benefits. Therefore, if you plan to start a school-based mentoring program, ensure that you have practices in place that reflect the developmental and social needs of the specific age and gender of the youth population you plan to serve.

2. What outcomes do you want to foster in your mentees?

**Answer: A.** The benefits of school-based mentoring differ from those of community-based mentoring. In community-based programs, mentored youth were less likely to start using drugs and to skip school; and got along better with parents and peers, compared to youth placed on a waiting list for mentors. These findings represent a broad assortment of outcomes including several that are non-school related.

In comparison, a recent study by Public/Private Ventures of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring programs found several positive outcomes at the end of the first school year—including overall academic performance and reduced skipping of school—all of which were academic or school-related.

3. What types of activities will your mentors and mentees do together?

**Answer: A, B, and C.** A number of activities, including tutoring, playing games, and talking, are appropriate for mentors and mentees to enjoy together. Programs should strive to foster developmental relationships between mentors and mentees—based on activities that allow mentor-mentee pairs to get to know each other and build a relationship. Age appropriate games and conversations offer a chance for matches to form a connection before working on goal-centered activities.

Instrumental activities (i.e., goal-oriented activities, such as discussion of grades, attendance, behavior or doing homework) can result in positive youth outcomes if the mentees leverage their mentors to achieve goals. Although neither study described in the article systematically studied whether or not youth requested the activities the match engaged in, there was some observational data from the SMILE study suggesting that instrumental activities may be useful when mentees request help in these areas from the mentor. So, for example, if a mentee asks

his or her mentor for help with homework, the mentor should feel comfortable providing it—the key distinction being that the youth is both the focus and driver of the activity.

4. How long will your program make significant efforts to sustain the matches?

**Answer: 12 Months.** The two recent studies of SBM described in the article by Karcher and Herrera found that during the first school year of program involvement, school-based mentoring matches lasted an average of either three or five months and most of the matches ended at the completion of the school year. While positive benefits were reported for youth at the end of the first school year, many of these benefits were not sustained into the next school year. Increasing the length of the school-based matches past a school year may, thus, result in sustained benefits for youth.

#### *True or False*

5. I am starting a school-based mentoring program because it is cheaper than a community-based mentoring program.

**Answer: False.** The Public/Private Ventures study mentioned above found that the cost per match for BBBS school-based mentoring programs was roughly the same as that of its community-based mentoring programs. While variations in cost may occur based on program design and infrastructure, the decision to start a school-based mentoring program should be based on the needs of youth being served and the desired outcomes—not by the cost of the program.

6. I am starting a school-based mentoring program because it does not require the same intense screening for mentors as community-based mentoring programs.

**Answer: True and False.** Because of the disruptions caused by holidays and summer vacations, more and more school-based mentoring programs have begun to expand their scope of services to allow mentors and mentees to meet outside of the school setting. For example, research suggests that matches that remain in contact over the summer months are more likely to continue into a second school year. These findings are critical because they uncover the importance of looking outside of the confines of the school calendar to provide lasting and high-quality school-based mentoring relationships to youth.

For programs that choose to allow mentors and mentees to meet without program supervision during summer months, screening requirements should equal the intensity of community-based mentoring. However, if programs sponsor match activities or determine ways to offer low-risk contact between mentors and mentees during the “off” months, less intensive mentor screening may be acceptable.

## Part II: Is Your School-based Mentoring Program Effective?

1. In my program, mentors receive, *Answer: C – Initial and ongoing training.*

Mentoring programs must provide high-quality training to mentors before and after the match is made. Mentors who reported higher levels of mentor program staff support and training had closer matches that were more likely to carry over into the following school year than mentors without this support. Given the connection between match duration, quality, and youth outcomes, training and support appear to be crucial for running effective school-based mentoring programs.

2. When matches meet in my program, *Answer: C – Staff actively engage with mentors and matches to supervise and monitor relationships.*

The mere presence of program staff may not be enough to adequately support mentoring matches. Because mentors often require additional support, feedback, recognition, and guidance, staff from more effective programs take a proactive role in seeking out mentors, offering feedback, and guiding the mentors during the match meetings.

3. Mentors talk with school staff, *Answer: C – Regularly.*

In the BBBS SBM study, mentors with more frequent communication with school staff reported better quality relationships with their mentees than those with less frequent communication. Additionally, those with more adequate access to school resources and space were more likely than mentors without these supports to carry over their matches into a subsequent school year.

4. Mentors in my program, *Answer: C – Work with mentees to mutually decide what activities to do together—sometimes these are academic and sometimes they are not—depending on the wants and needs of mentees.*

High levels of relationship-focused activities are associated with positive outcomes, whereas high levels of goal-specific activities are associated with negative outcomes. A good gauge of what activities will be best for the youth may be for the mentor to work with mentees to mutually decide what activities to do together.

Mentees appear to benefit most from activities that emphasize getting to know their mentors and having fun, and from discussions that relate to the youths' interests. These relationship-focused activities, also known as "developmental activities," have been associated with positive outcomes in youth. Instrumental activities (activities that are directed toward leveraging specific changes in, for example, grades or behaviors) may yield positive results but in high doses have

been associated with negative outcomes. However, while research has not tested this formally, positive results from the use of instrumental activities will likely occur when mentees, not mentors, initiate these activities. Past research on CBM has found that “prescriptive activities,” that is, those that are mentor-driven, goal-directed, and primarily reflect the mentor’s need to see specific academic or behavioral improvements in the mentee, have been negatively associated with quality, duration, and outcomes of the match. (See Answer 3 in Part I for additional details).

5. My program matches youth with mentors, *Answer: C – At the start of the school year.*

Because duration of mentoring matches is an essential part of promoting positive benefits in youth, matches that start later in the year may not allow enough time for youth to fully benefit from these relationships. Programs should explore strategies to ensure matching takes place as early in the year as possible to allow for longer-lasting relationships, and consider starting mentees in relationships during strategic grades to foster longer relationships before the youth will transition to a new school.

6. Over the summer, for matches that plan to continue beyond the first year, *Answer: C – My program provides resources for matches to continue communicating via email, phone, letters, or in person over the summer months.*

Many school-based matches will terminate at the end of the school year. The mentors in these matches should be encouraged to bring closure to their relationship using a procedure they have been trained in by program staff. Leaving the relationship open-ended may result in youth feeling rejected by those mentors who decide not to continue into the next year. Given the high likelihood that matches will close at the end of the school year, program staff should help make this termination clear to the child.

For those matches that want to continue into the summer and next academic year, programs can help foster effective long-lasting mentoring relationships by providing support and guidance for the match. By offering support for these mentors and mentees to continue their relationship into the summer, the likelihood of a second year of the mentoring relationship increases. However, programs that offer support and suggested activities for matches must ensure that their mentors have been adequately screened to go beyond the highly structured and supervised meetings that occur during the school year.

## Part II: Scoring Sheet

For each question, give yourself the following scores. If you answered:

A = 0 points

B = 1 point

C = 2 points

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

Total Points: \_\_\_\_\_

- **If you scored 0-5**  
Your program incorporates few or none of the effective practices research has identified for school-based mentoring. Closely review the article written by Drs. Herrera and Karcher. In addition, contact your state or local *Mentoring Partnership* for more in-depth training and technical assistance to strengthen your programming. Mentoring that is not implemented well has the potential to harm vulnerable youth more than not having a mentor at all. In order to ensure that your program does all it can to ensure the safety of your mentees, review those questions on which your program scored 0 or 1 and see what changes could be made.
- **If you scored 6-11**  
Your program uses some of the effective practices uncovered from research on school-based mentoring. Take the time to thoroughly review Dr. Karcher and Dr. Herrera's article. To strengthen the effectiveness of your school-based mentoring program, make sure that your training, staff/mentor relationships, school partnerships, activities, and summer programming reflect the latest research.
- **If you scored 12**  
Congratulations! Your program already incorporates many of the effective practices research has identified on school-based mentoring. Keep up-to-date on the latest research and continue to look for ways improve your program.

## School-Based Mentoring

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- High School Mentor Activity Report  
[www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/eeptoolkit/operations/ongoing/highschoolmentoractrpt.doc](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/operations/ongoing/highschoolmentoractrpt.doc)
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**Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory - National Mentoring Center.** National organization that provides training and technical assistance to youth mentoring programs.  
[www.nwrel.org/mentoring](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring)

- The ABC's of School-Based Mentoring, Technical assistance packet.  
[www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/pack1.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/pack1.pdf)  
[www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/pack1app.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/pack1app.pdf)
- Keeping Mentoring Relationships Going during the Summer Months, Fact sheet.  
[www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet2.pdf](http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet2.pdf)

**U.S. Department of Education.** Federal government agency that provides funding, resources, and guidelines for schools and mentoring efforts throughout the country.  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

- Yes, You Can: A Guide for Establishing Mentoring Programs to Prepare Youth For College  
[www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/yyc.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/yyc.pdf)

## Notes

## Notes

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