Youth Mentoring Program Grant

- The Youth Mentoring Program, a competitive grant, is housed at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) within the U.S. Department of Justice.
- The program is funded by the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations subcommittee in the House and Senate.
- The youth mentoring program supports the implementation, delivery, and enhancement of evidence-based mentoring services to improve outcomes and ensure that at-risk, or underserved youth have the supports they need to thrive.
- The grant funds direct service youth mentoring programs serving at-risk and high-risk young people implementing evidence-based practices and allows programs throughout the nation to shrink the mentoring gap.
- The OJJDP grant also funds the National Mentoring Resource Center, an online research and evidence-based practice hub that offers no-cost quality training and technical assistance to mentoring programs across the country to improve their practice and desired outcomes for young people.
- In FY21, the grant was funded at $100 million. While this is good news, unfortunately, the total federal investment in quality youth mentoring programs across the government has fallen in the past decade, dropping dramatically from its highest funding level of more than $177 million in FY09.
- MENTOR National and its partners call on Congress to fund the OJJDP Youth Mentoring Program grant at a minimum of $120 million in FY22.

The Foster Youth Mentoring Act | Reps. Karen Bass (CA-37) and Don Bacon (NE-02)

- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act is a bipartisan bill that would authorize funding to provide support to mentoring programs that serve foster youth. Programs would be eligible to receive funds to support the expansion of their services to more youth in foster care and to improve services for current foster youth in their programs.
- Youth in foster care face many challenges including disruptions in education, stable and permanent familial connections, and often lack personal relationships with consistent caring adults who provide them emotional, educational, and professional support.
- The bill would increase coordination between mentoring programs and child welfare agencies by supporting the expansion of mentoring services for foster youth.
- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act will be re-introduced during the 117th Congress. MENTOR National calls on Representatives to contact Reps. Bass and Bacon to be original sponsors, and calls on interested Senators to consider introduction of the bill in the Senate.

The Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School Act | Reps. Tim Ryan (OH-13) and Jaime Herrera Beutler (WA-03)

- The Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School Act is a bipartisan bill that offers evidence-based interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. It expands funding for schools to integrate much needed supports for chronically absent youth, including pairing trained mentors from school personnel or community-based mentoring programs with these students.
- Students who are chronically absent—meaning they miss 10 percent or more of the school year—are more likely to fall behind academically, which can lead to hardships later in life. These students are 68 percent less likely than their peers to graduate.
- The presence of a consistent caring adult can be the key to supporting regular attendance, and studies show that students who regularly meet with mentors are 52 percent less likely than their peers to skip a day of school.
The bill allows schools to tailor solutions based on why individual or groups of students continue to be absent, so it is not a one size fits all approach.

Once educators understand the supports each student needs, schools can partner with local health, transportation, and social service providers to provide temporary shelter, medical assistance, and other necessary services.

The Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School Act will be re-introduced in the 117th Congress. MENTOR National calls on Representatives to Contact Reps. Ryan and Herrera Beutler to become original sponsors and Senators to consider introduction in the Senate.

Address the Homework Gap to ensure students can stay connected to schools and social connection

Even before the pandemic, the Homework Gap – defined as lack of access or inconsistent access to reliable internet connectivity – was experienced by up to 12 million K-12 students.

The inequity among students experiencing this gap is stark. According to Pew Research:
  - 37% of rural Americans do not have broadband internet access at home
  - 35% of students from households with annual incomes below $30,000 do not have access to high-speed internet at home
  - 25% of African American households and 23% of Hispanic households with school-age children do not have access to high-speed internet at home

In 2020, MENTOR National joined with more than fifty education and youth-development organizations in calling on Congress to address connectivity challenges as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Representative Grace Meng (NY-06) and Senator Ed Markey (MA) introduced the Emergency Educational Connections Act to quickly drive resources to schools and libraries through an existing FCC program called the E-rate.

Schools and libraries would use these funds to support remote access to the internet for schoolwork via the most logical and simple solutions at a reasonable cost. Since no one-size-fits-all solution exists to address all students, the bill supports Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, connected devices, and other advanced telecommunications and information services.

The FCC’s E-rate program is uniquely positioned, as the only federal program that supports schools and public libraries’ with connectivity, to be used to quickly and efficiently to address the Homework Gap.

Most importantly, the E-rate can distribute funds equitably and can reach every Congressional district as needed.

An updated version of the Emergency Educational Connections Act will be re-introduced to support student’s ability to successfully learn and succeed in school, and maintain social connection. MENTOR National calls on Congress to support investment in the E-rate to address the Homework Gap, including supporting Rep. Meng and Sen. Markey’s bills.

MENTOR supports two other youth mentoring bills that will be introduced during the 117th Congress:

1. The Transition to Success Mentoring Act which is sponsored by Representative André Carson (IN-07). The bill ties a mentor to a middle school student identified as a risk of dropping out of school before graduation to support the transition between middle and high school and throughout their remaining years in grade school.

2. The Mentoring to Succeed Act which is sponsored by Senator Dick Durbin (IL). The bill authorizes funds for school districts, local governments, and community-based non-profit organizations to create or expand school-based mentoring to support students who are at-risk while intentionally combining trauma-informed training for mentors and supporting career exploration and workforce development goals for students.