

Mentoring to Succeed Act of 2021

Barriers such as childhood poverty, inadequate schools, chronic absenteeism, poor academic achievement, disability, adverse childhood experiences, community violence, drug and alcohol abuse and misuse, multiple disciplinary actions, exclusionary discipline policies, and juvenile justice involvement can lead to poor academic achievement and life outcomes. Students who grow up facing these challenges without a strong support system cannot successfully transition to high school, college, and the workforce especially after 2020. Not only has the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted students' access to the classroom, but MENTOR reports that in existing programs only 57 percent of mentors could regularly contact students and 29 percent of mentoring programs had to decrease their staffing capacity. School-based mentoring programs are an effective strategy to help at-risk students thrive in school, career, college, and life and they are more vital than ever.

The Need in Our Communities. According to a 2014 study, there are an estimated 16 million young people, including 9 million at-risk youth, who will reach 19 without ever having a mentor. As a result, these youth will miss out on the powerful effects of mentoring that are linked to significant outcomes:

- 52 percent less likely to skip a day of school.
- 55 percent more likely to be enrolled in college.
- 81 percent more likely to participate regularly in sports or extracurricular activities.
- 78 percent more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities.
- 130 percent more likely to hold leadership positions.

Researchers at the University of Chicago found that Youth Guidance's school-based mentoring program, *Becoming a Man*, reduced arrests for violent crime, improved school engagement, and increased high school graduation rates.

Workforce Readiness and Soft Skills. Mentoring programs can help youth develop the workforce skills employers are seeking. A 2016 study found that eight in ten employers say social and emotional skills are the most important to success, and yet are also the most difficult skills to find in job applicants.

The Solution: Pairing Students with Mentors. The federal government can strengthen investments in school-based mentoring programs to help at-risk youth develop the academic, social, and workforce skills that lead to success.

The Mentoring to Succeed Act of 2021 would do the following:

- *Invest in Mentoring Programs.* Establish a five-year, competitive grant program that provides federal funding to establish, expand, or support school-based mentoring programs.
- *Help Students Overcome Adversity and Trauma.* Provide grant recipients with funding to train mentors in trauma-informed practices and interventions to increase student resilience and reduce juvenile justice involvement.
- *Strengthen Workforce Readiness.* Support partnerships with local businesses and private companies to help at-risk students with hands-on career training and career exploration.
- *Close the Opportunity Gap.* The grant program would give preference to applicants that develop a plan to help prepare at-risk students for college and the workforce.
- *Support Capacity Building.* The grant program would support partnerships with nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations to serve more at-risk students.
- *Enhance Student Success.* Federal grants would provide grant recipients with funding for program evaluation.

Supporters: America's Promise Alliance, Association of University Centers on Disability, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Chicago, Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago, Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois, College Mentors for Kids, Inc., Disability:IN, Girls Inc., JFF, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, Metropolitan Family Services, National Alliance of Faith and Justice, National CARES Mentoring Movement, National Council for Independent Living, National Disability Mentoring Coalition, StriveTogether, The YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, Year Up, Youth Guidance.