

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: ESTABLISHING A SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING PROGRAM

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Issues Being Addressed:

Research shows that children who have a mentor are more likely to stay in school, go on to college, have improved relationships with adults and peers, and have positive attitudes about themselves and their future. College students are in many ways ideal mentors for children because they often have the desire, time, and resources to be a great mentor. Starting a mentoring program on campus can provide an amazing and impactful experience for college students and the children that they mentor.

Actions to Consider:

Determine the need: A successful mentoring program meets a specific need among children in the community. Decide what the focus or primary objective of your program will be; for example, to improve children's self-esteem, to improve the children's grades or health, or simply to provide a role model to a child who needs one. Make sure that the program has realistic goals and that you have access to the support and resources that you will need to create the program.

Create parameters for the program: Design the program based on the following questions:

- Which school(s) will you partner with?
- How often and when (before, during, or after school) will mentor pairs meet? What is the timeline for the program?
- What will a typical mentoring session look like? Who will supervise?
- Which children will you serve? How will you recruit them?
- How will you recruit, screen, and select mentors?
- How will you match mentors and mentees?
- Whom will you involve as advisers, staff, and participants?
- What costs will be involved and how will you pay for them?
- How will you evaluate the success of your program?

Establish partnerships and program management: Once you have a clear idea of your program you can approach schools as potential partners in the program. Decide how many schools to partner with (How large do you want the program to be?) and develop a partnership with those that share your vision of the program. Establish what each partner's role will be and how you will communicate and handle conflicts through written contracts.

Policies and Procedures: Now it is time to set written guidelines for the program.

- Develop a recruitment program and screening for mentors. (The most effective and easiest way to screen mentors is through ICHAT, Michigan State Police's criminal background check program.)
- Develop a training policy including an initial training session and manual as well as ongoing training for mentors. Set clear boundaries and expectations for mentors and develop an attendance and behavior policy. Make sure to include information about confidentiality and mandated reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect. Other training topics could include information about mentoring, school policies, child development, poverty, and resources for mentors.
- Develop an evaluation policy and create evaluation tools.
- Develop a program for mentors to reflect on their experiences with the program.