

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: TIPS FOR PARTNERING WITH A SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING PROGRAM

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Issue(s) Being Addressed:

School-based mentoring is a fun, educational, and effective form of community service. But creating and managing school-based mentorship opportunities for college students can be a unique challenge.

Overview:

What might happen if kids at a primary school are in need of mentors, and nearby college students are looking for volunteer opportunities with kids? Naturally, a school-based mentoring program is a great solution. However, the schools most often in need of mentors rarely have funding for community service coordinators. It is easier for a college to form a partnership with such a school indirectly – that is, through a local youth serving organization that already provides school-based mentoring. Adrian College created an effective school based mentoring program by partnering with the organization, “Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lenawee County,” in collaboration on a school-based mentoring program called *Lunch Buddies*. The partnership took an unanticipated amount of teamwork and organization, but was able to provide essential services to kids at a local primary school and a fun and educational experience for Adrian College students.

With Whom to Partner:

Local youth-based community organizations can offer a wealth of experience in managing and creating school-based mentoring opportunities. A local county or city volunteer center, often with a chapter of the United Way, can often direct you to youth-based non-profits that offer mentoring.

In selecting an organization with which to partner, certain factors should be taken into consideration. A community organization needs to have sufficient capacity to process, place, and manage the number of mentors anticipated, or to be able to form an agreement with a college to provide such training that a representative at a college may be able to process, place, and manage such mentors. Organizational philosophies on non-discrimination should match, especially with respect to non-heterosexual people, as this is occasionally an area of contention and controversy. Finally, in selecting an agency with which to work, it is important to look for good safety and risk management strategies. These include the prescreening strategies of criminal background screening, screening interviews (for mentors and mentees), and checking character references. Also, an organization should offer a training to orient mentors to the responsibilities associated with being a mentor, as well as keeping in regular contact with mentors and mentees and visiting the primary school to track the progress of a match.

Before beginning a partnership, a college and community partner should take time to specifically plan who will be responsible for the different aspects of the partnership. Regular communication and meetings should also be planned.

On Recruiting College Students:

- Identify on-campus student service organizations (e.g. Circle K) to address during a meeting, or that might otherwise announce school-based mentoring opportunities to their members.
- Post flyers and posters and hand out quarter sheets about mentoring opportunities.
- Some professors or academic departments may require students to perform community service or work with kids (e.g. education majors). Fraternities and sororities also often have service requirements. Mentoring is a great way for students to fulfill such requirements.
- Keep in mind that although mentoring can be a great way to fulfill a service requirement, specifically requiring students to mentor may not be good idea. The commitment and consistency required to mentor does not lend itself to being required. Just as kids should be placed with mentors only voluntarily, college students should only enter into such service by choice.