MENTORING: AN INVESTMENT IN FOSTERING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A CRITICAL NEED FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

In 2013, one in five American youth did not finish high school,[1] and one in four African-Americans and one in five Hispanic students go to schools where graduating is not the norm.[2] Even among graduates, 20 percent require remedial courses in college and far too few go on to earn a college degree.[3] The number of disengaged youth (not working or in school) is 5.6 million, which represents 14 percent of youth in the United States.[4] Low high school graduation rates represent a collective lifetime loss of individual earnings and subsequent tax revenue to the government. A 2009 study on the crisis of non-completion of secondary education showed that an individual with a high school diploma has an average earning potential of 109 percent higher than that of an individual without a high school diploma. For a single individual, this translates to an average of $400,000 in lost earnings over a lifetime.[5]

In the next decade, more than half of all new jobs will require some postsecondary education,[6] leaving many youth with few prospects. These academic outcomes have consequences on social and health related conditions and paint a picture of lost potential in economic and social terms for the United States as a nation.

$306,906

AMOUNT THE GOVERNMENT SPENDS ON SUPPORT SERVICES OVER A LIFETIME OF AN INDIVIDUAL WHO DOES NOT GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL[7]

MENTORING AS A LEVER FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

One critical lever to foster better educational outcomes is to provide positive mentoring relationships that can transform the trajectory of a young person's life. Mentoring — the pairing of a young person with a supportive non-parental adult or older peer — can significantly shape that young person's successful path to adulthood. Studies have shown that mentored youth are 52 percent more likely to stay in school and also complete more homework assignments than youth without mentors.[8]

A meta-analysis of 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programs showed that mentoring improves outcomes across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic spheres of a young person's development simultaneously.[9] Mentors provide guidance, support, and encouragement that effectively build the social-emotional, cognitive, and positive identity of a young person. In addition to providing youth with the confidence, resources, and ongoing support they need to achieve their potential, mentors increase the likelihood of the young person developing external and internal assets — structures, relationships, values, skills, and beliefs that promote healthy development and lead to future successes.

> " Virtually every aspect of human development is fundamentally shaped by interpersonal relationships. So it stands to reason that when close and caring relationships are placed at the center of a youth intervention, as is the case in mentoring programs, the conditions for healthy development are ripe. "
>
> *Dr. Jean Rhodes, Director, MENTOR/ University of Massachusetts Boston Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring*

Programs that formally incorporate mentoring are often designed around specific goals, such as academic achievement, career preparation, and positive social behaviors. However, mentoring can also happen informally in youth programs or in other settings where young people receive guidance and support from an adult they engage with naturally, such as a teacher, sports coach, or job supervisor. In fact, a study of school-based mentoring showed that mentoring programs not focused on academic objectives were just as effective at positively impacting academic outcomes because the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship was a catalyst for improvement.[10] Recent years have seen the growth of many different forms of mentoring: peer-to-peer, group, and online, all of which can be effective if implemented with evidence-based practices.

MENTORING: A CALL TO ACTION

This brief is meant to provide an overview of the state of academic achievement in the United States and to illustrate the role mentoring can play in improving academic outcomes. Whether as funders, researchers, school administrators, or program staff, we all have a role to play in investing resources strategically in a way that can improve the quality of, and access to, mentoring, while expanding our understanding of this approach.

Barriers to Academic Achievement		**Academic Achievement**
• Chronic absenteeism • Inadequate academic preparation • Multiple suspensions • Poor academic performance • Poverty • Repeating a grade	**SUPPORT FROM MENTORS** ➤	• Academic skills and preparation • Non-cognitive skills development • Providing access to supports in the community

A NEED TO INVEST IN MENTORING

Mentoring is particularly critical because it helps young people overcome the barriers and risk factors in achieving successful academic outcomes (see above). If a student misses just two days of school a month, s/he misses 10 percent of the school year.[11] A mentor's support can keep youth engaged in school and lead them to perform better by addressing these barriers in three critical ways: facilitating continued academic achievement, developing non-cognitive skills, and providing access to external supports.

> " I believe so strongly in the power of mentoring because I know the transformative effect one caring adult can have on a child's life. That caring adult is a gateway to all the other resources that a young person needs to fulfill their potential. "
>
> *Alma J. Powell, Chair, America's Promise Alliance*

A. FACILITATING CONTINUED ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Mentors can keep youth engaged in their academic path in two ways. First, mentors can serve as an intervention at the onset of early warning signs for not completing high school. Researchers note that "attendance, behavior, and course performance in reading and math (the "ABCs") are highly predictive of students' likelihood to graduate from high school and to go on to succeed in college".[12] The average grade of chronically absent youth is "D," and students with this GPA are more likely to not complete school.[13] Mentors have been shown to improve mentees' school attendance,

MENTORING & CONTINUED ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

A 2014 national survey on young people's perspectives on mentoring conducted by Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates shows:

At-risk youth with mentors were 55 percent more likely to be enrolled in college than those who did not have a mentor

45 percent of at-risk youth with mentors are enrolled in some sort of post-secondary education compared to 29 percent of at risk youth who never had a mentor

Survey respondent: *"If I had gotten an adult mentor from sixth grade to sophomore year, I would have a different life by now for sure. I ended up with more mistakes which have had their lasting consequences and left me with regrets."*[14]

boost their academic performance and increase their chances of completing high school.[15]

Secondly, mentors can guide mentees in continuing their education past high school and improve their potential lifetime earnings. A 2014 survey on the effects of mentoring showed that young adults who had been at risk for not completing high school but who had a mentor were more likely to see positive academic outcomes than their peers without mentors.[16] The box above highlights key outcomes mentors have had on youth's academic engagement as demonstrated in this same study.

B. DEVELOPING NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS

Mentoring relationships aid with the development of non-cognitive and time-management skills that are critical for overall success. Increasingly, researchers and teachers alike attribute success in school to non-academic skills. This success is not about IQ but rather about the character of young people: their ability to persevere, be optimistic, and respond to challenges. Mentors can work with youth to help them set

MENTORING IN ACTION: iMentor

Based in New York City, iMentor is a school-based program that builds mentoring relationships to empower students from low income families to graduate from high school and college by pairing youth with a college educated mentor. iMentor uses both in-person and online communication tools to develop and maintain mentor-mentee relationships. Mentors help mentees develop college plans, set goals to achieve those plans, and even help with preparation for standardized tests or state exams. A 2012 impact study on iMentor's program showed:

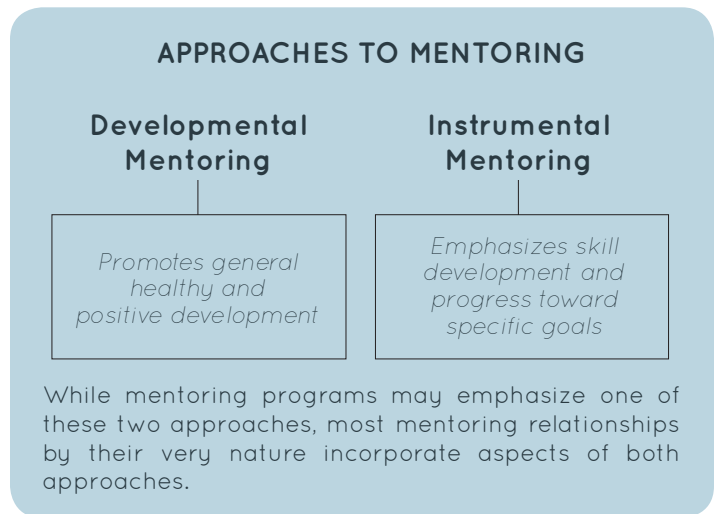|		
75 percent of iMentor high school graduates enrolled in college, while **84 percent** of those college students persisted into their second year.	On average, iMentor youth demonstrated growth on **4 of 7** non-cognitive skills from the pre-test baseline to the post-test assessment.	Mentor students scored **7 percentage points higher** than a comparison group of NY state students on standardized English and math exams.

goals, have a regular study schedule, build leadership skills, advocate for themselves, and develop self-confidence and character. A positive relationship with a mentor can also lead to stronger relationships with teachers and peers as youth engage more intentionally in school.[17]

C. PROVIDING ACCESS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

As youth transition toward school completion and adulthood while navigating complex decision making, mentors can be a bridge to external supports that youth and their families may not be aware of or have access to. This kind of networked approach to supporting a mentee can include academic supports, such as tutoring or academic counseling, or even non-academic supports such as connecting youth to mental health services, various forms of assistance to their families, and college-planning services.

APPROACHES TO MENTORING

Developmental Mentoring	Instrumental Mentoring
Promotes general healthy and positive development	*Emphasizes skill development and progress toward specific goals*

While mentoring programs may emphasize one of these two approaches, most mentoring relationships by their very nature incorporate aspects of both approaches.

MENTORING & ACCESS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORT

The 2014 national survey on young people's perspectives on mentoring conducted by Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates compiled the following anecdotal testimonies on mentoring:

"My mentor came into my life and provided structure, did things with me that my parents couldn't. He took me out to play ball, just sat and talked with me, and kept me from doing other things, like being in the streets."

"My mentor attended the college I'm at now, and she took me out and informed me of how to get into college. She was always there to support me."[18]

> " As a teacher, principal, and superintendent, I've seen how mentors can profoundly affect students' lives and when integrated and leveraged by schools, can contribute to successful outcomes…In education we don't give up on kids. Strong mentoring relationships can set the standard for valuing young people, and show that giving up is not an option. "

Dr. Betty Molina Morgen, 2010 American Association of School Administrators National Superintendent of the Year

SPOTLIGHT ON MENTORING AND BLACK MALE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The mentoring field must seize on the opportunity to build the academic achievement of boys of color. Boys of color, and particularly black boys, rank near the bottom of almost every educational metric — they have lower graduation rates, are disproportionally placed in special education, are less likely to attend or complete college, and have higher disciplinary rates than their peers[19]. However, many black boys are thriving in school and an emerging body of research[20] highlights this success and the supports necessary to achieve it.

Mentors are one critical support. Research indicates that engagement with school[21] (behaviorally, motivationally, cognitively) and positive racial identity[22] are key catalysts of academic achievement for black boys. Mentors, especially black male volunteers, can be instrumental in helping youth see educational success as something that can be inherent in their identity. They can also help instill a growth mindset — a belief that one can achieve academically regardless of one's starting point — which has proven to be a successful strategy for improving outcomes for students of color.[23] Mentors can also hold these youth to high standards, demand accountability for their academic performance,[24] and serve as an advocate when they encounter institutional barriers to success.

A strong mentor can help black boys overcome the tremendous damage done by a constant barrage of negative stereotypes. They can help black boys internalize positive feelings about education and their ability to achieve academic goals, empowering them to tap into their strengths and assets.

MENTORING IN ACTION: Concerned Black Men CARES® National Mentoring Initiative

CBM CARES® National Mentoring Initiative is part of a comprehensive outreach project administered by Concerned Black Men National. This specialized mentoring initiative is designed to improve academic and life outcomes for at-risk boys enrolled in targeted middle schools in select communities nationwide. CBM CARES®, which is presently being administered in 9 sites across the country, incorporates both in-school and out-of-school mentoring components and weekly group mentoring sessions.

Youth have at least **8-12 hours per month in the group program and 12-16 hours of monthly service** in the one-on-one matching program.	The program places **equal weight** on academic achievement and social skill development.	The program has **written agreements** with all schools and parents to share academic data including behavioral performance.	All CBM CARES® project sites have shown **improved attendance** and academic performance in both math and English skills.

WAYS TO INVEST IN MENTORING

With at least 25 percent of young adults at risk of not achieving a "productive adulthood," there is a great need for cross-sector investments in mentoring.[25] In the past 30 years, the federal government has strengthened its investment in mentoring programs.[26] However, there are still 16 million young people, including 9 million at-risk youth, who will reach age 19 without a mentor.[27] Public and private investors, school administrators and staff, and mentoring program staff can help advance mentoring by improving the quality of practice, increasing access to mentoring services, and expanding the understanding of the impact of mentoring.

I. IMPROVE QUALITY OF MENTORING

The quality of mentoring provided to young people is crucial to the mentoring relationship and experience. Various participants are needed to play strategic roles:

Public and private investors can ensure that their grantees incorporate proven, evidence-based practices in their programming. MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ and National Quality Mentoring System offer excellent entry points for identifying proven, effective programs. There is also a need to invest in technical assistance and capacity building efforts to support programs in the implementation of these best practices. Additionally, investors can sponsor mentor-mentee activities so that mentors are not prevented from participating due to financial constraints and support research to better understand how mentors can help meet specific academic needs.

Program staff can shape the quality of the mentoring experience as they train and recruit mentors. Staff can ensure that recruitment efforts engage mentors from various diverse backgrounds that are reflective of the young people they will mentor. Additionally, cultural competency training for mentors can help improve cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Program staff can incorporate training components that enable mentors to support youth with academic tasks and set goals related to school.

II. INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTORING

In addition to quality mentoring, stakeholders can play a role in increasing young people's access to mentors.

Public and private investors can encourage grantees to incorporate a more formal mentoring component into existing positive youth development models. This is useful for responding to students identified in Early Warning Systems as being at-risk for not completing high school. Investors can also support programs that employ Youth Initiated Mentoring strategies that teach youth how to identify potential mentors from their community.[28]

School administrators can foster a culture of mentoring within schools to increase the number of youth in mentoring relationships. School leaders can work with local mentoring programs or *Mentoring Partnerships* to teach staff how to more effectively build developmental relationships with students. School staff can provide targeted mentoring by tracking attendance to identify chronically absent students and referring them to mentoring programs. Additionally, schools can implement an Integrated Student Support (ISS) model by including mentors as part of general school support systems as well as partnering with other appropriate youth service providers, such as mentoring programs, to ensure that students have the support they need to achieve high academic outcomes.

III. EXPAND UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

Public and private investors can work with their grantees to develop both short- and long-term indicators since strong mentoring relationships take time to develop and translate into measurable academic improvements. Additionally, public and private investors can use non-academic outcomes, such as attitudinal and behavior outcomes that are associated with, or are precursors of, academic gains. This will allow investors and grantees to evaluate the young person's transformation across a broad spectrum of diverse indicators.

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