

How to Design a School-Based Mentoring Program

A mentoring program can be an enriching and engaging component of a Program of Study's enhanced learning. These guidelines are for a community or public organization to design a program with a school partner.

Using MnPOS

Length: 3 months to 1 year of planning

To design a school-based mentoring program, the school and program organizers should ask themselves the following questions that will clarify the objectives and goals of the mentoring program. This process is the first part of the program development process; information gathered from these questions will direct the rest of the program development.

Partnering with a School: Goals, Roles & Responsibilities

What are the goals of the mentoring program?

The goals of your program might not directly address students' school performance, but should be aligned with the school's priorities. For example: reducing students' truancy or tardiness or improving student academic achievement might be some of the program's goals. Goals should be written and refined until they clearly describe desired outcomes. Program goals should also be achievable and measurable.

What will be the initial size and scope of the program?

With any new program, it's a good idea to start small and build gradually. Mentoring programs need to develop a strong infrastructure to support adult-youth relationships. In addition, it takes time to build trust with your partner (school). You also want to have a timeline for developing, implement and revising effective procedures for recruiting, screening, training and matching mentors. It also takes time to monitor and support the mentor-mentee matches once program has begun.

Who are the key staff people responsible for the mentoring program?

While someone will have primary responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the mentoring program, it's also important to have one or two people from the school who serves as a liaison. This helps promote buy-in from other school personnel and ensures that the lines of communication remain open between your organization and the school.

What's the role of the principal, school advisers, and teachers?

It's obvious the support of the principal is essential, although his or her role will most likely be limited to activities such as encouraging advisers and teachers to participate, explaining the program to parents or speaking at recognition events. Teachers and advisers, however, have a key role to play. Program organizers must be careful to respect their workloads and the structure of their daily schedules.

What are the legal and liability issues?

Be sure that potential liability issues are discussed with the school and that an agreement is reached regarding sharing responsibility. Issues might include: screening mentors, confidentiality, student safety, and mentor safety. Also agree on insurance coverage and limits for reporting and tracking any incidents.

Are there any financial agreements to be made?

Schools operate on extremely tight budgets. Generally, a school's contribution to a mentoring program will be in the form of in-kind contributions, such as space for mentor-student meetings or materials and equipment to use. The school might, however, be able to budget small amounts of money for an event such as a mentor recognition ceremony.

What procedures will be used to inform parents about the program and gain their consent to have children mentored?

Work with the school to develop a form that parents sign to give permission for their children to have a mentor. It's recommended that at the beginning of the school year, the school informs parents via flyers or brochures available for parents to pick up when visiting the school. Having this information helps parents buy into the program, but can create a potential problem if parents request specific mentors for their children.

How will you evaluate the program?

Consider how you'll measure the accomplishments of the mentoring program and the effectiveness of each mentoring relationship. How will you and the school identify whether the goals you set have been met? You'll want to look at your program on an ongoing basis, and at the end of the school year see if your objectives were met. Examples of measures: the number of mentors who were matched with students; the length of the matches; student, mentor, parent and teacher satisfaction; outcomes for students (what changed — better attendance, improved classroom behaviors, improved life skills?). Agree on how you will collect the information.

The Role of Teachers

In school-based mentoring programs, teachers typically:

- Refer students
- Help with the mentor-mentee matching process
- Communicate the progress made, indicating if there are inconsistencies or problems
- Encourage parents to become involved in the program
- Participate in program evaluation, often by completing a questionnaire at the end of the school year

Getting Started

- Allow yourself a **pilot year** to solidify the partnership, build a program infrastructure and learn from successes and mistakes.
- Write it Down: Develop a memorandum of agreement that clearly defines the goals of the program and describes the roles and responsibilities of your organization and the school. A **written agreement** helps ensure that both partners — the school and your organization — have clear expectations.
- Be sure to **address these questions**:
 - How many mentors will be matched with students during the first year of the program?
 - Will students be recruited from only one or two grades or from all grades in the school?
 - When during the school year will the matches begin?
 - Will you continue to provide new mentors during the school year as teachers identify new students who could benefit?
 - How long will each meeting last? How often will mentors meet with students?
 - What is the length of commitment you expect mentors to make to the program?
 - Will mentors be encouraged to return to the program and meet with their students the following school year?

Additional Information

Minnesota Programs of Study: Recommendations for Mentoring Programs

www.iseek.org/mnpos/toolkit/advisers/mnpos-Mentor.html

- Education Northwest: National Mentoring Center Resource Collections - <http://educationnorthwest.org/nmc/resourcecollections>
- Hamilton Fish Institute and National Mentoring Center - *Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring: A Guidebook for Program Development* - http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/180
- Hope for Tomorrow: Curriculum - <http://hopefortomorrowmentoring.org/?q=curriculum>
- Hope for Tomorrow: Toolboxes for Mentors and Mentees - <http://hopefortomorrowmentoring.org/?q=toolbox>
- Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota: For Mentoring Programs - <http://www.mpmn.org/Resources/ForMentoringPrograms.aspx>
- National Mentoring Partnership: Elements & Toolkits - http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/elements_and_toolkits