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A HELPING HAND- A MENTORING PROGRAM BETWEEN STAFF AND
STUDENTS

by
Beth Frances Norcia

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts in Educational Administration Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by
Professor

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ABSTRACT

Beth F. Norcia

A HELPING HAND- A MENTORING PROGRAM BETWEEN STAFF AND
STUDENTS

2004/2005

Dr. David Moyer

Master of Arts in School Administration

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a mentoring program in increasing academic success, improving self-esteem and decreasing disciplinary infractions. Data collection and initial interviews conducted with the mentors indicated the program was successful in improving the self-esteem, social skills and academic performance of most at-risk students. However, these evaluations need to be further developed and expanded in order to make a more conclusive judgment on the program's effectiveness, due to several factors.

Results were determined by using two methods of research. The first method used interviews from program participants. The second method was data collection. Student grade point averages and discipline referrals were compared for this and the previous school year. Findings were reported to the teachers, staff members, and administration.

It was concluded that the mentor program was effective for most students. It was difficult to determine if the improvement shown was directly correlated to mentor support or if other outside variables were key factors to student achievement.

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I also wish to thank Mr. Bradley Bauer, Mr. Arthur Hill, Mr. Richard Keegan, and Mr. James Varsaci, who have encouraged me every step of the way.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

A mentoring relationship varies depending on the needs of the student. In general, each relationship must strive to advance the educational and personal growth of the student. In education, the term mentor is often used synonymously with that of faculty advisor. A fundamental difference, however, between mentoring and advising is that mentoring is a personal, as well as a professional relationship with the individual being mentored, that reaches its full potential over an extended period of time. Therefore, a mentor must be aware of any changes in the lives of each student in order to vary the degree and type of assistance and encouragement he or she provides.

Mentors are trained volunteers who make a commitment to provide one-on-one assistance to identified at-risk students for about an hour, at least once a week. Mentors can assist with academic assignments, check homework, help with test preparation, check assignment lists, and tutor. Mentors become role models who provide students with the supportive care and concerned friendship often missing from their lives. A mentor is someone who takes a special interest in helping another person develop into a successful individual.

The intern sought to provide a program for students who are struggling in a variety of ways and to give them the support they need.

Purpose of the Study

Using a quantitative research design, the purpose of the mentoring program is to increase academic success, improve self-esteem and decrease disciplinary infractions thereby reducing the likelihood of a student dropping out of school. The results of this study will also answer the following questions: Is a mentoring program enough to help already struggling students? Do students in grades 7 through 12 respond positively to staff members' advice and solutions? Do mentors have enough training to be able to assist students with their many emotional and social needs?

Once the study's findings prove the value of this proposed student-assistance program, they will be shared with teachers, staff members, and administrators with the expectation that support will be provided for the continuation of this mutually beneficial program.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to ensure the uniform use and understanding of each term throughout this study:

At Risk Students – Any student who might be in need of assistance due to academic, social, or emotional troubles.

GEPA – Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment

HSPA – Grade 11 Proficiency Assessment

ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) Standards – Six model standards for school leaders which present a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances to enhance educational outcomes.

Maple Shade High School – The building that houses grades 7 through 12.

Mentor – A staff member assisting with the emotional, social, and behavioral needs of a student in grades 7 through 12 attending the Maple Shade Jr./Sr. High School.

MSAA – Maple Shade Administrators Association

MSEA – Maple Shade Education Association

MSMSA – Maple Shade Maintenance Staff Association

Limitations of the Study

Students who have already experienced academic and/or disciplinary trouble may not be open to having a staff member assist them. They may have developed a negative view towards staff and school and may have already given up. Age is another factor which may limit the number of student participants, fearing ridicule from classmates. The number of staff volunteers, who may otherwise want to take part in the program, may be limited in light of an existing workload which may already be at a maximum.

Setting of the Study

Maple Shade is located in southern New Jersey across the Delaware River from the Tacony section of Philadelphia, in the southwest corner of Burlington County. The 3.85 square mile town borders Cinnaminson to the north, Mount Laurel to the South, Moorestown to the east, and Pennsauken and Cherry Hill townships to the west.

Maple Shade enjoys a rich and interesting past. For much of its history, Maple Shade was part of Chester Township, founded in and authorized by the English Royal Charter in 1712. Maple Shade continued as a village within Chester Township until November, 1945 when its name was changed to the township of Maple Shade, taking that name from the many maple trees in the area.

The 2000 census shows Maple Shade with a population of 19,079. Charles Thomas, owner of Century 21 Thomas Realty on Main Street, said the median home price in Maple Shade, up 10 percent in the last year, is about \$115,000. Although affordable homes are available, housing in Maple Shade has experienced a dramatic change largely due to the increased number of apartment dwellings now available within the community. Between the residents of single-family homes and apartment dwellers, the total number of families living in Maple Shade is 4,718, each with an average family size of 2.95.

Ethnic profiles distribute the current population of 19,079 people as follows: Whites at 15,868; Blacks or African Americans at 1,376; Asian at 1,164, American Indian and Alaskan Native at 30; Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander at 8; and "Other" at 323. No other ethnic group grew as quickly during the 1990's in Maple Shade as the Indian population with a surge of 420 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Maple Shade's first school, the Little Red School House, is believed to have been constructed in 1812. Located on West Main Street, it has been preserved and maintained by the Maple Shade Historical Society. School No. 1, a two-room schoolhouse, was built in 1909 on North Poplar Avenue. Two more rooms were added to the school in 1913. In 1926, two additional wings of four rooms each were added to School No.1. School No. 2, now known as the Steinhauer Elementary School located on Chester Avenue, was constructed in 1920. Seven years later School No. 3, now known as the Maude Wilkins School, was built. School No. 4, named the Howard R. Yocum School in 1989, was built in 1959.

Rapid growth in the 50's brought about the need for additional classrooms. A plan for expansion of school No. 2 to its present size was approved in 1954, permitting the

organization of a junior high school in September 1955. School No. 2 became the junior high, housing grades 7, 8, and 9. In 1966, the junior high was named the Ralph J. Steinhauer Junior High School. In 1972, however, the complex returned to its original function as that of an elementary school.

Maple Shade had always been a sending district: sending students at the high school level out of district. Although the organization of the junior high school alleviated some of the need to do this, overcrowding at Moorestown High School necessitated the transfer of students to Merchantville for grades 10 through 12 until 1972 when the Maple Shade High School was built, eliminating all together the need to send students out of district.

In recent years, the township has approved two Board of Education referendums: one in 1991 for \$5,875,000 and another in 1999 for \$9,945,000. This year's referendum will ask for funding in the amount of \$27,951,340 for expansions and upgrades to all four of the district's schools. The Maple Shade Board of Education's Policy Manual presents an organizational chart listing the community at the head of the organization. Below the community is the Board of Education, which consists of nine elected members charged with establishing policy for the school district. The superintendent is directly answerable to the board and is advised by the solicitor, a contract consultant, and the board secretary. In direct line of authority under the superintendent are the school business administrator, the Child Study Team supervisor, and the principals of the four school buildings. The School Business Administrator is responsible for supervising and coordinating many vital services including: central office personnel, Director of food services, transportation, Director of building and grounds, and maintenance.

The four schools begin their supervisory structure with the individual principals. The high school has three vice-principals, a coordinator of computer services, and two area supervisors who, between them, cover athletics and all academic areas. Answerable to the principal and the supervisors are the teachers, librarians, nurses, aides, and clerical staff.

There are three main organizations within the district. The Maple Shade Education Administration (MSEA) is the largest recognized bargaining unit and represents all teachers and aides. This is a union shop organization with 100 percent membership. In addition, the Maple Shade Maintenance Staff Association (MSMA) represents all maintenance workers. Principals and supervisors belong to the MSAA. All other employees have no union representation.

The Maple Shade School District maintains four school buildings: three elementary and one Jr./Sr. high school. An administrative office, housing the Child Study Team, is also located on the high school property. No new buildings are planned, however, additional wings at the elementary level are planned for 2005.

Maple Shade High School employs one principal, three vice principals, two area supervisors, 70 teachers, a school nurse, 12 classroom aides, 20 support staff, and has an enrollment of 985 students. The school is a one-story, four-wing structure containing grades 7 through 12. The site covers 25 acres with ample, on-site parking and athletic fields. There is a 5,600 square foot cafeteria, a 3,900 square foot library which houses the media center and a 6,200 square foot auditorium as well.

Maple Shade is a working class, blue-collar town with a low tax base and a school district which is financially sound and notorious for not taking financial risks. Its motto

has always been, “Can’t afford it, then don’t do it.” Yet it manages to keep a sizable reserve available for those unexpected, but inevitable emergency needs.

For the passed six consecutive years the Maple Shade school budget has been approved. In fact, over the passed ten years, its school budget has only been defeated twice.

Significance of the Study

This is an important study because the data that is collected will provide guidelines for the planning and implementation of a mentoring program between the staff and students for the 2005-2006 school year. Maple Shade is a blue-collar, working class community with a high number of single-parent households. Many of the students coming from these households have a greater potential for making inappropriate choices because of a lack of parental support. With disciplinary referrals on the rise and GEPA / HSPA scores continuing to drop, there is an immediate need for implementation of a program like this which targets students exhibiting great potential for success but who are currently in need of academic, social, and emotional support. This study will not only contribute to scholarly research, it will benefit stakeholders of the project, administration, the Board of Education, and the community at large as well.

Relationship to the ISLLC Standards

This study gave the intern the opportunity to extend and enhance skills in the following areas related to the ISLLC Standards: knowledge, disposition and performance. In terms of leadership development, the purpose of this study includes, but is not limited to, the ISLLC Standard 2, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a

school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” Standard two has three separate areas of development. In the area of knowledge, the mentoring program increases student growth and understanding, applies learning theories and motivational theories and aides adult learning and professional models. Disposition is another part of the ISLLC standards. It states that: “The administrator will believe in and value and will be committed to”. The mentoring program ensured the intern’s involvement in being committed to student learning for all as fundamental purpose of learning, continuing professional development and lifelong learning, providing safe and supportive learning environment and creating successful adult building. In the area of performance, the intern was able to facilitate activities that: encouraged human dignity and respect, identified student barriers to learning, assessed student learning regularly, celebrated staff and student accomplishments and have high expectations for staff an students.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a mentoring program to determine whether or not the proposed activities will produce tangible results regarding the success of the student participants in the Maple Shade High School. Chapter 1 will serve as an introduction to the study and will include insight into its focus and purpose. This chapter will define the terminology relevant to the study, as well as its limitations and setting, in an attempt to justify the significance of the study. The remainder of this study will be presented as follows: Chapter 2 will focus on a review of the literature. A general description of the study’s design will be given on Chapter 3 along with a description of the design development of the research instruments used. Chapter 3 will also include a

description of the sample and the sampling technique. The data collection approach and a description of the data analysis plan will conclude this chapter. The research findings will be presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5, will describe the major conclusions, corresponding implications, as well as the implications on the intern's leadership development. This final chapter will also address how the organization changed as a result of the study and will include a statement regarding the necessity for further study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Too many young people in our nation's public schools are struggling academically, socially, and behaviorally. Each day in the United States 3,600 students drop out of school and 2,700 unwed teenage girls get pregnant (Cutshall, 2001). There are a variety of reasons that lead children down the different paths in their lives. Planned mentoring programs have flourished as one possible solution to the problems affecting the youth (Thompson & Vance, 2001). Such programs have been publicized as being able to fix problems including drug and alcohol use, pregnancy, self esteem issues, discipline problems, and juvenile delinquent activities. The Education Commission of the States listed mentoring as one of the five short-term imperatives for reversing the high dropout rate among high school students in 1988. Public school officials have been, for years, trying to develop programs that will aid school children who continue to resist. School-based mentoring is the latest technique, however, very little research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of such mentoring programs.

At-risk Students

The issue of at-risk students is complex. Because the risk factors faced by young people are so many and varied, they are always open to interpretation and dispute. Researchers who have investigated the likelihood of students dropping out of school have mentioned demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as: living in

unstable school districts, being a member of a low-income family, having low academic skills, having parents who are not high school graduates, speaking English as a second language, living with a single parent, having negative self-perceptions, and having low self-esteem as being closely related to this event. Although mentoring programs notoriously target only at-risk students, at-risk has a broad range of definitions. Youths can be defined as at-risk because they engage in risky behavior (Thompson & Vance, 2001). Students can be considered at-risk for skills, knowledge, motivation, and/or academic ability that are significantly below those of the 'typical' student. At-risk students may be those who have made poor choices or decisions having a negative impact on their academics. In one study, Nunn and Parish (1992) found that at-risk students had a history of unexcused absences and lateness, were significantly below average in school performance, had behavioral and disciplinary problems and had less self confidence as a learner, and desired a more informal and nontraditional approach to learning. In another study, Dryfoss (1990) reported that at least seven million young people were behind their expected grade level in school and about 14 percent of every class did not graduate from high school. The data supported a strong correlation between at risk students and low academic achievement. Because at-risk youth are at a significantly higher risk of failure, it is crucial that programs which assist at risk youth in overcoming these difficulties, be assessed and implemented.

The increase of at-risk students and students who could benefit from mentoring is on the rise. Widespread family breakdown, erosion of neighborhood ties, and the time demands placed on working parents have created a situation in which fewer young people have an opportunity to form a significantly close relationship with a non-parental

adult before actually reaching adulthood themselves (Steinberg, 1999). The increased number of single parents has also created the problem of having youths with limited adult contact on a daily basis. Mentorship programs have been designed to help fill this need for contact with positive adult role models who provide support and guidance (Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting & Dornsife 1995).

Mentoring Relationship

A mentoring relationship can take on many roles. In the best relationships, the adult helps the youth define and achieve his/her goals. Many youth mentoring programs have appeared since the late 1980's, however the concept of mentoring has an extensive history. Freedman (1993) described the traditional concept of mentoring as older men assisting boys with learning a trade. These were natural relationships that were formed without any fancy titles or responsibilities. There are now about 4,500 programs that offer mentoring programs in the United States. A recent national survey found that approximately 2.5 million adults had provided one-to-one mentoring to a young person in a formal mentoring program (Dryfoss 1998). A much larger number reported that they have mentored a young person in the past year in a less structured setting. These naturally occurring mentoring relationships that begin outside of a formal program are common in today's society.

Mentor Training

Trained mentors have a desire to be part of someone else's life, to help them follow their goals, and handle tough decisions. They have to be invested in the mentoring long enough to make a difference (Thompson & Vance, 2001). Good mentors balance a respect for the real and serious troubles that students might face with confidence about

finding sensible solutions. They are able to identify what the real issues are and to suggest solutions for dealing with those issues. Mentors are most successful when they receive thorough training before working with young people (Flaxman, 1992). It is effective if they receive coaching and support throughout their involvement. Training the educators may offset any trouble that they might encounter during their tenure with the child (Flaxman, 1992). While most mentoring relationships develop and flourish without serious problems, things do happen. Mentors have an important role but that role does not include medical or psychological treatment or family counseling (Cutshall, 2001). There are support systems in place for these types of emergencies. A mentor is expected, however, to help guide a young person to an appropriate source for professional help.

Programs

The number of students at risk for educational failure is increasing and often schools are unable or unwilling to accommodate them. School-based intervention and mainstream assistance teams are becoming more widespread as teachers increasingly try to meet the complex needs of students at risk (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, 1990). However, at-risk students have the potential to succeed if their needs are recognized and addressed. There have been many different tactics used over the years to try to address of these problems. Traditionally, schools have responded to student diversity and poor academic performance with approaches such as ability grouping, grade retention, special education, and pull-out programs in which students are removed from their regular classrooms and offered remedial instruction in particular subjects (Letgers, McDill, & McPartland, 1993). Other districts use physical fitness plans, technology based programs, tutoring and even reaching out to the community for added support.

Studies

The evidence that exists on determining if mentoring programs are successful is mixed (Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting & Dornsife, 1994). Stanwyck and Anson (1989) find that students who are assigned mentors are more likely than students who are not to enroll in a post secondary education. In another positive area, McPartland and Nettles (1991) found a reduction of nearly three percent in school absence rates in youths involved in the program. In a study involving the Big Brothers/Big Sister organization, Thompson and Vance (2001) found that having a mentor positively affected the academic achievement of at-risk youth. These are all positive areas of growth that support the need to continue these programs. Research from Dr. David DuBois (2002) concluded that mentoring programs can increase attendance, positive attitudes about school, and increased chances of enrolling in higher education. DuBois (2002) also cites mentoring relationships in “enhancing social and emotional development and preventing negative risk behaviors.” Although slow to emerge, there is a growing amount of information and results that show mentoring as having a significantly positive impact in this area.

The DuBois (2002) study offers a warning, however, about making sweeping statements that all youth mentoring programs work. Slicker and Palmer (1993) examined the impact of a mentoring program between staff and students with 86 at-risk tenth graders. The results indicated no difference in grade point average or dropout rate between the groups. McPartland and Nettles (1991) showed no impact on promotion rates or overall achievement. In fact, when the 55 evaluations in the DuBois study were amassed using statistical calculations, it showed that youth mentoring programs have

small benefit for the average youth in the programs. However, when program design factors were considered, well-designed mentoring programs produced a much greater impact on the lives of the youth than poorly designed mentoring programs.

Stronger results emerged among those youth who had closer mentoring relationships. This was measured by regular contact, emotional closeness, and longevity. Program practices that ensured longevity included: training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and youth, expectations for frequency of contact, support and involvement of parents, and monitoring of overall program implementation (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, 1990). Three features essential to the success of any mentoring program are screening, orientation and training, and support and supervision (McPartland and Nettles, 1991).

One of the major problems with being able to show tangible evidence that mentoring programs are successful is that there are many limitations. The inconsistencies of the mentors, the subjectivity of academic achievement, and discrepancy between the level of the training programs are a few of the problems that make the research very difficult to measure.

The need for mentoring programs and other programs designed to aide at-risk students is at an all time high. With the educational demands from the federal government, school districts are scrambling to implement unproven programs to help meet these demands. Many districts, however, are not overly concerned that available data has not yet shown any measurable improvements. The consensus and opinion of many districts implementing these programs is, however, that the number of children demonstrating success is more than before their program's implementation. Many districts are implementing other programs as well, and combined these programs are

showing success for some of their at-risk student. In conclusion, mentoring programs that have a positive impact on youth provide sufficient resources and structure. Together these provide positive mentoring relationships for both the student and the mentor.

CHAPTER 3

The Design of the Study

Introduction

The mentoring program aimed to help students develop the instinct and maturity needed to cope with real world problems. However, in order for this program to be effective, a determination must be made to see if additional support by an adult would be valuable enough for a student to be able to make a turn around and succeed.

General Description of the Research Design

The intern used two primary data collection sources: quantitative analysis of administrative data available on students involved in the program and interviews with staff and students involved in the active mentoring program. Some of the documentation reviewed was: discipline files, Individual Educational Plans, report card grades, and any additional information found in student files. Interviews were conducted at random times and documented by date.

Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The intern felt it was best to compare discipline records and grades from students to determine whether or not a mentor relationship could have a positive impact on the students involved in the program. The intern compared records from the previous school year, 2003-2004, with those from the current school year, 2004-2005. This was done on a month-to-month basis.

The intern felt that interviewing participants monthly gave an ongoing assessment of the program and allowed for program changes if needed. While the two

data sources helped to aid each other in terms of final conclusions of the assessment of the overall program, each is meant to represent a separate yet complementary viewpoint on the questions of the study.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

There were 985 full-time students enrolled at Maple Shade High School during the 2004-2005 school year. Students who participated in the program were not chosen arbitrarily. These students were pre-selected by teacher recommendation based on discipline problems, academic failures, social concerns, and potential for success. Students entered the program at various times depending on their needs. The program expanded during the first few months, starting with nine students and growing to twenty-one. This also increased the staff needed to mentor the program participants. The mentors who participated in the program volunteered and were not randomly selected. The intern matched up the students and mentors based on strengths of the mentors and the needs of the students. The intern collected data on all students and interviewed all participants in the program monthly.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

Data was collected through individual and/or group interviews and document review. Key respondents varied and depended on such factors as availability of staff, comfort level of the selected participants with program, and number of active mentors and students. Structured, open-ended questions were used as well as yes/no questions. The data collection process occurred over the course of 6 months, between September of 2004 – March of 2005. The data collection process continued until all participants were evaluated adequately to provide a solid assessment for the study based on response-based

criteria. The intern then created a document representing the data in a quantitative format.

The intern personally administered the interviews to program participants. At given times, some questions were asked in groups while others were asked individually. Before the interviews were conducted, the intern explained that the purpose was to gain feedback. The intern stated that the school continuously strives to make improvements for the students and is seeking their feedback concerning the effectiveness of the program for adoption in the future.

Data collection of material review was highly structured and controlled. Data on each individual student were coded and charted monthly. The data was categorized as behavioral or academic. A comparison of this data was made and changes in performance from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2004-2005 school year were noted.

In addition to identifying if mentor support was enough to sustain student success, the intern also wanted to answer the following questions: What age group did the intern see the most positive development? What are the reasons for students' decline in school? What can be added to the mentoring program to give students more chances for success? Do mentors have enough training to be able to assist students with their many emotional and social needs?

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The intern created a chart showing the number of discipline infractions, by month, for the year 2003-2004 and compared them with the 2004-2005 year. The intern created a chart showing the comparison of academic grades, by month, from each year. After all interviews were completed, the intern began the data tabulation. This process was

straightforward but time-consuming. Responses to the open-ended questions were tabulated and synthesized. The open-ended responses were then categorized. The intern sorted through all other data to determine the benefits of a mentoring program for the next school year. Results were reported in a descriptive manner with recommendations for the mentoring plan for the 2005-06 school year. The results are described in Chapter 4 of this paper.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Research Findings

The intern proposed to learn whether or not a mentoring program produced tangible results in the improvement of discipline and academic successes of students in grades 7-12 enrolled in Maple Shade High School. The major findings generated from this study were attained from data collection from the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 school years and from random interviews with mentoring participants.

The purpose of the data collection and analysis was to explore the connection between having a mentor and meeting with success in school. The study involved large amounts of data and produced a correspondingly rich variety of findings. At the end of the analysis process, the intern had created two graphs. One graph showed the total number of discipline referrals overall for all students in the mentoring program and the other compared each participants' grade point average.

Chart 1- Percent of Mentoring Participants by Grade Level

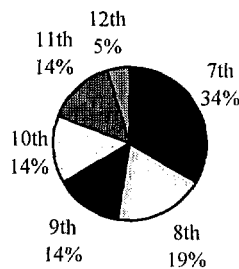


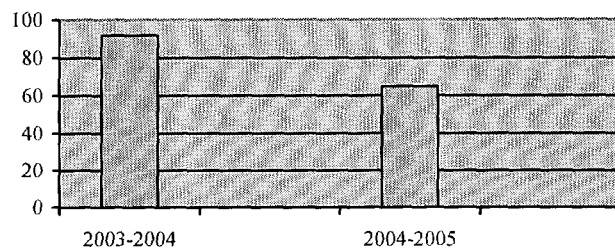
Table 1 shows the participant data by grade level. There were a total of 21 students involved in the program. The breakdown by grade level was seven students in grade

seven, four students in grade eight, three students each in grade nine, ten and eleven and one student in twelve grade. There were fourteen male and seven female participants.

Currently there are 21 mentoring participants. Some participants started in September, whereas others may have started with mentors as late as January. The intern admitted mentoring participants on an as needed basis. Data collection for each student was calculated based on the length of time the student was involved in the program.

The data collection is graphed in chart two. The graph compares the total discipline of all students in the mentoring program for the 2003- 2004 school year and 2004-2005 school year. Students being mentored during the 2003-2004 school year had 92 referrals to the main office. With mentors assigned during the 2004-2005 school year, the same students had 65 referrals to the main office. There has been a decline in the total number of discipline by 27 referrals.

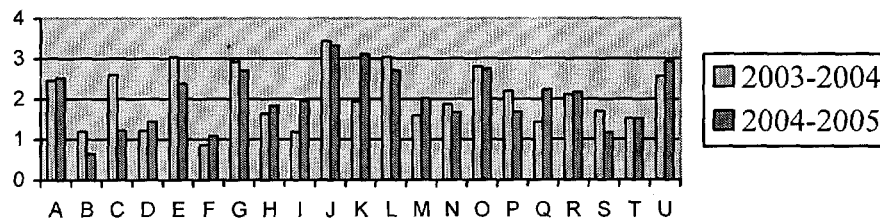
Chart 2 - Total Discipline of Mentoring Participants



Academic success was compared by calculating the grade point averages of each student during the first two marking periods for the 2003-2004 school year and the 2004-2005 school year. The highest earned grade point average, without honors classes, is a 4.0. The overall averages are seen in chart three. A letter identifies each student. The grade point average from the 2003-2004 school year is observed in the first column above

the letter corresponding to each student. The grade point average from the 2004-2005 school year is observed in the second column above the letter corresponding to each student.

Chart 3 - Grade Point Averages



The results show that 11 of the 21 students or 50 percent of the students saw an increase in academic success in the year they had a mentor. One-half of the students did have a drop in grades during the marking periods that were calculated.

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain first-hand perspectives of the mentoring process by individuals involved in the program. The interviews were conducted randomly and were conducted three times during the course of the study. The intern did not interview every mentor or student with every set of questions. The focus of the interviews was to understand why the mentoring program was needed, how it assisted students, and how it could be improved. The first interview focused on background information and participant perceptions of what mentoring means to them.

Question 1: What is your definition of mentoring?

- All mentors interviewed felt the definition of mentoring was to assist someone in overcoming a weakness. They felt it was the mentor's responsibility to guide and help a student. Other commonalities were the mention of friend, advisor, role model or coach. All answers were very positive.

Question 2: Why do you think mentoring is needed in Maple Shade?

- Some individuals responded to this question in a general way. One mentor thought that students who don't have supports at home needed someone that they can count on for help and guidance. Others discussed the specific problems that Maple Shade children face: single parent homes, high transient rate, low incomes, parent's minimal education and low expectations. Everyone interviewed felt there was a need for mentoring.

Question 3: Why do you want to be a mentor?

- The intern found that the answer to question three had many different answers. Mentors volunteered for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons were personal, while other reasons included wanting to help children reach their potential. One mentor recalled her youth and desired to help someone they way a teacher once helped her. Another mentor thought it might soften his image to other students. Of the 12 mentors that answered this question, 90 percent of the mentors volunteered for the students and not for how the program could help them.

The second interview was created to follow up on issues raised from the first interviews. The main focus, however, was on the present relationship of the mentor and the student.

Question 4: How is the mentoring relationship maintained?

- The intern found that 75 percent of mentors were meeting with their student at least once a week, calling parents when needed, and checking with their student's teachers when needed. The other 25 percent were doing the latter in

addition to tutoring the student after-school. Speech, child study team members, and guidance department personnel provided additional support. In general, the mentors acknowledged working very hard to improve their students' overall person.

Question 5: How is the mentoring relationship improving weaknesses in the students?

- Most mentors have noticed the student being more positive in the classroom setting. They did noticed changes in their attitude and taking responsibility for their actions. A few mentors commented that student grades have improved and the student was having less discipline referrals.

Question 6: How do you perceive the present mentoring relationship?

- 100 percent of mentors perceived the relationship as successful and going well. Three mentors commented that the relationship was frustrating at times. Examples of this included students not showing up for meetings, having discipline occurrences or failing tests.

The intern planned that the third interview would focus on how the mentoring program could be improved.

Question 7: What mentoring program supports would be more appropriate for the needs and interests of the mentoring relationship?

- Mentor responses varied. Some mentors commented that they would have benefited from formal meetings with all mentors and students. Other mentors wanted more administrative buy in. A suggestion was made to ask

disciplinarians to communicate with mentors prior to taking disciplinary action.

Question 8: Have the problems/issues identified earlier been resolved?

- While many commented that they thought the program was successful, no one felt that the issues had been resolved completely. Some felt it was a work in progress and that they were seeing slow improvements.

Question 9: Do you think the mentoring program was successful for your student and yourself?

- All felt that the mentoring program was a success this year, although there was room for improvement. They all wanted to continue to be a part of the program, and hoped that others would too.

The above data and interview results, indicate the following in response to the intern's questions in this study:

1. Is a mentoring program enough to help already struggling students?
 - The results showed improvement in some areas. Overall, students made steady progress in academic achievement and disciplinary infractions.
2. Do students in grades 7 through 12 respond positively to staff members' advice and solutions?
 - All relationships were successful. All participants were pleased with their pairing. Students all responded that they enjoyed the attention from their mentor.

- Do mentors have enough training to be able to assist students with their many emotional and social needs?
 - The training component appeared to adequately prepare the mentors for any predicament they might have encountered. The school system is a tiered system that allowed mentors to have other supports if needed.
3. In what age group did the intern see the most positive development?
- The results did not indicate a particular grade level that saw more improvement than another.
4. What are the reasons students start to decline in school?
- Some students interviewed talked about situations at home while others blamed peer influences. Others could not give a reason.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Introduction

The intern conducted a study to determine if a student-mentoring program is enough to increase a student's success in school. Conclusions were based on responses from interviews that were administered to mentoring program participants and data collection.

Conclusions and Corresponding Implications

The data collection and interviews conducted with participating mentors showed the program to be successful in improving the self-esteem, social skills and academic performance of at-risk students. However, the research needed to be further developed and expanded to make a more conclusive judgment on the program's effectiveness due to several factors. It was difficult to determine if the improvement shown was directly correlated to mentor support or if other outside variables make a significant impact on the results. These variables may have included: a death of a family member, divorce of parents, maturity level, different courses, teachers and vice-principals, and use of drugs or alcohol. Although the research shows improvement, it cannot be determined if the mentor program was solely responsible for the development. The results did, however, indicate the following points that were especially noteworthy:

1. One half or (50 %) of the students saw an increase in their grade point averages during the time they had support of a mentor.

2. Discipline referrals dropped from 92 to 65, which is a difference of 27 referrals.
3. Interviews suggested that all participants enjoyed the extra attention and support.

Although the results were inconclusive, this research provided the intern with an opportunity to recommend a mentoring program for the next school year. It also provided information that was used to formulate an improvement plan.

The intern suggested that data collection be via surveys rather than interviews so that areas in need of improvement can be better identified. In addition, wording on several of the questions should be modified to reflect response categories that are easier to categorize.

The intern demonstrated many of the ISLLC standards during this research project. These standards included promoting the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. Professionally, the intern had knowledge of students' growth and development and used this information to create change. She created a safe and supportive learning environment for students who, in the past, had difficulty adjusting to the school's atmosphere.

Implications of Study on Organizational Change

The purpose of this research, in terms of intended organizational change, included a chance to provide feedback to school administration. Research results indicated that the program yielded mostly positive outcomes for at risk students. The results indicate that

the district should continue to allocate monies for the development of the mentoring program.

The feedback from the mentors provided recommendations for minor improvements in areas of the program. Survey results were shared with the Superintendent and the Principal of the high school. Plans were made to improve upon each of these areas.

Suggestions were made to:

1. Meet monthly as a group
2. Allocate funds for group trips
3. Provide opportunities for additional community involvement
4. Implement ways to establish better communication between disciplinarians and mentors
5. Obtain parental and district permission to do things with students outside school hours

Further Study

Based on what was found, there is a need for further study in the following areas:

1. Did the mentoring program provide enough support to enable student success in future years?
2. What other methods of support can supplement the mentoring program?

As new strategies emerge, research is needed to determine effectiveness of the impact on at-risk students.

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