Peer mentoring: providing a partnership for guidance through school

Geoff Haines
Rowan University

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PEER MENTORING: PROVIDING A PARTNERSHIP FOR GUIDANCE THROUGH SCHOOL

by
Geoff Haines

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University
May, 2005

Approved by.

Date Approved 4/20/05

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The purpose of this study was to provide at-risk students with peer mentors to guide students as they make the transition from the intermediate school level to the middle school level. The study resulted in the creation of a program that formed a partnership between 7th-grade at-risk students and honor roll 8th-grade students who participate in after-school programs. Subjects were 35 7th-grade students, identified as at-risk students, at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. The subjects' grades, incidences of discipline referrals, and attendance were analyzed. After the at-risk students were identified, 35 8th-grade students were chosen to act as mentors for the at-risk students. The 8th-grade students all were honor roll students who participated in at least one extracurricular activity. The 8th-grade students were trained to be mentors and then met regularly with the at-risk students. Results of the study showed that a significant amount of the at-risk students improved their grades, attendance, and incidences of discipline. In addition, the mentors began to perceive themselves as leaders. The peer mentoring program had a significant impact on the students involved.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people who have been extremely influential in not only my progression in the educational field, but also to the person that I am. First and foremost are my parents. Mom and Dad you raised me well. You taught me to be respectful and ambitious, but at the same time to be humble and caring. Those qualities are probably what led me to the field of education and then to the desire to be a school leader. My family has quite an educational background...mom and grandmother were teachers, dad worked his way through the ranks to the administrative level in higher education, and my grandfather was an elementary school principal for a quarter of a century. Teaching and leading, you can say, are in my blood.

Thanks goes out to all of the teachers and administrators who have influenced me in so many positive ways. Missy Quinn, thanks for all you did for me in my internship. Dr. Hurley, without your guidance I would not be where I am today. Thank you both.

Lastly, to the two that influence my life everyday now. First, my wife Krista, thanks so much for putting up with my late nights at class, numerous hours researching and writing on the computer, bad moods, and for your assistance in my goal of becoming a school administrator. To my daughter Kelly, you really have changed my life. When I first started working on my Master’s Degree you were a dream that mommy and I had. Now, you are the love of my life. As a future school administrator I must be a perfect example for my students and teachers. I hope that I become a perfect example and role model for you, being there whenever you need me. You have brought a joy to my life that I could never have imagined...and I thank you (and I forgive your little fingers for touching the keyboard and shutting off the computer as I wrote).
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Mentoring can be found throughout our country. Corporations have mentor programs for new employees, and mentoring can be found throughout the field of education. First-year teachers are required to be mentored during their first teaching assignment. First year administrators are required to be mentored by a veteran administrator during their first role as a school leader. Educational administrative interns must be mentored, both in the field and at the university level. The Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations have been around for decades to help guide youth that may need an extra support system. There is a growing trend across America to mentor students, particularly those deemed as at-risk. What better place is there than at school to give at-risk students extra attention? There, students have constant contact with caring adults, also known as teachers. Why not enroll caring peers to assist in mentoring younger students and making their transition into the next grade level and new building easier? McElroy (2000, p. 1) has stated, “Young adolescents face a wide range of choices. What is more, every day they bring events from their out-of-school lives to school with them.” Having a partner, or a mentor, can assist students make the right choices.

In the Egg Harbor Township School District there is an Intermediate School that houses the 5th-grade and 6th-grade students, while the Middle School houses the 7th-grade and 8th-grade students. Many new 7th-graders find themselves lost and overwhelmed when they begin attending middle school. In addition, they are not aware of the numerous extra-curricular activities that are available at the middle school. These range
from student council to art club to athletic teams. Unfortunately, many students find that they cannot make the grade in the classroom and participate in athletics or any extracurricular activities. Having a mentor, who is a successful student-athlete or participates in other extracurricular activities and who has already made that transition, can assist the students in numerous ways. Extracurricular activities are not to be taken lightly in their benefits for students. Yes, nearly every student-athlete has little or no shot at making it to the big leagues, but their involvement with such activities is extremely beneficial. A recent study completed in 2003 by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), which is presented on its Website under Survey Resources, found that activities actually support the vision and mission of schools. This is evident by the following example on the NFHS Website:

They [activities] are not a diversion but rather an extension of a good educational program. Students who participate in activity programs tend to have higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems than students generally. Through participation in activity programs, students learn self-discipline, build self-confidence and develop skills to handle competitive situations. (p. 1 & 2)

Students need activities at school, but they need to be eligible to participate. A peer that can help guide them and make the correct choices can assist in making this happen

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide at-risk students of the Egg Harbor Township Middle School with a peer mentor, within the building, using action research. In turn, the program created would branch out to the Egg Harbor Township Intermediate
and High Schools in the future. The study resulted in the creation of a program that guided the students and provided them with a role model to show them how to be a successful student at the next level. The term peer mentor can be described as a somewhat older student who “listens to, cares for, gives advice to, and shares information and life…experiences with another, especially a young person requiring assistance” (Dondero, 1997, p. 2).

Definitions

- **mentor** someone who is more experienced or older and provides guidance
- **at-risk students** those who are disadvantaged and less likely to be successful
- **ISLLC Standards** a set of standards developed for school administrators by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium
- **marking period** a 45-day period where grades are calculated and placed on a report card
- **ineligible list** students are on this list that have two or more F’s in one marking period
- **Likert Scale** a scale used in surveys where numbers represent a response (for example: 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = excellent)

Limitations of the Study

One of the weaknesses of the study was being able to define and identify at-risk students at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School. After identifying students, it was difficult obtaining parental permission to participate in the program. Also, finding a time in an at-risk student’s schedule to meet with a mentor was difficult. Giving the young mentors an added responsibility, on top of their already busy schedule, was taxing for some of the mentors. Pairing up students and creating a good match was not an easy task.
A hurdle in the project was finding mutual times that the pairs could meet. Some of the at-risk students were not so eager to be mentored or not ready to open up to their new mentor. Utilizing a random and small sample size also was a limitation to the study.

Setting of the Study

The study took place in the Egg Harbor Township School District, which is the school district for Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. Egg Harbor Township is located in the heart of Atlantic County, in the southern tier of the state of New Jersey, just a 10-minute drive from Atlantic City. Thus, in recent times, Egg Harbor Township has become a bedroom community for many of the casino employees of Atlantic City. Egg Harbor Township is one of the largest communities in the state, in terms of area. It is also one of the oldest, having been established in 1710. The township is approximately 75 square miles, with about 10% of the area being water. Egg Harbor Township is actually divided into two sections, with the towns of Linwood, Northfield, Pleasantville, and Somers Point falling between the two areas. The township, which used to encompass most of Atlantic County, is divided into the nine local communities of Bargaintown, Cardiff, English Creek, Farmington, McKee City, Scullville, Seaview Harbor, Steelmanville, and West Atlantic City. Egg Harbor Township was once known for its abundance of trees and wildlife, but there have been drastic changes in the township's notoriety.

Egg Harbor Township has seen a dramatic change in the past decade. The Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan labeled the township as a "regional growth area." This forced, rapid growth has caused a tremendous burden on the township and the school district. According to the United States Census Bureau the current population
is 30,726. This is roughly 15% of Atlantic County’s population. The population of Egg Harbor Township has increased nearly 25% since 1990. The population density is currently at 456.2 people per square mile, a figure that is currently on a steady rise.

According to staff writer Jack Kaskey (2002) of The Press of Atlantic City, Egg Harbor Township, along with Galloway and Hamilton Townships (the other two “regional growth communities”), accommodated over 75% of Atlantic County’s new homes in the year 2001. Egg Harbor Township alone was told to accept nearly 25,000 new homes by the Pinelands Plan. The township committee members and township residents have traveled to Trenton to address the rapid increase and seemingly nonstop building, but to date no relief or solution has really been determined.

The United States Census Bureau provided the breakdown of the 30,726 people who presently live in Egg Harbor Township. The last census categorized the racial breakdown of the residents of Egg Harbor Township. The figures for this show that the township is made up of approximately 79% white, 10% African American, 5% Asian, and 6% Hispanic or Latino. The average household size in Egg Harbor Township is 2.74, while the average family size is 3.23. The median age of the residents is approximately 36 years.

Homes in Egg Harbor Township range from multi-million dollar mansions to rundown trailers in numerous trailer parks; in addition, according to the census the median household income in the township is $52,550. The per capita income for Egg Harbor Township is $22,328. Over 5% of the people fall below the poverty line.

The rapid increase in population, coupled with the recent state freeze on school aid, has hit the taxpayers hard in Egg Harbor Township. The community has traditionally
been very supportive of the township’s schools. Attendance at school functions, from
athletic contests to musical productions, has always been great. Large tax increases over
the past few years have caused the voters to rethink their support of the school district’s
budget. The 2004/2005 school budget was defeated and cuts in programs soon followed.

With the rapid growth has come an increase in the number of businesses
developing in Egg Harbor Township. The community contains a large shopping mall,
numerous shopping centers, many office complexes, an abundance of local businesses,
restaurants from fast food to fine dining, the Federal Aviation Administration Technical
Center, the Atlantic City International Airport, and several hotels and motels. The
Blackhorse Pike, which is a merger of U.S. Routes 322 and 40, has become an area that
has witnessed tremendous industrial growth in the past decade.

A committee of five people governs Egg Harbor Township. According to the
township government’s Website, each committee member is elected in alternating three-
year terms. The five committee members choose, from among themselves, a mayor and
deputy mayor. All five members of the present township committee are members of the
Republican Party. This trend has been true for the past few decades.

Egg Harbor Township residents elect their board of education annually, making it
a Type II School Board. The board is made up of nine members whose time is strictly on
a volunteer basis. Three of the nine “seats” are voted on each year. If elected, a board
member serves a three-year term. Board members have had a tough time lately dealing
with the rapid growth of the township. Recent school budgets have attempted to deal
with the growth and the state’s freeze on school aid. The district’s superintendent, Dr.
Phil Heery, discussed the district’s recent budget history in his address to the district’s
faculty on September 1, 2004. He reported that the 2004/2005 school budget, though, was defeated, with 1169 voters rejecting the proposed budget and 1006 voting in favor. Voter turnout was low, considering there are over 22,000 residents over the age of 18. The previous school election went much better for the district. The voters supported the budget in 2003 for the first time since 1999, with 1497 “yes” votes and 995 “no” votes.

A superintendent and an assistant superintendent run the Egg Harbor Township School District. The district is a comprehensive K through 12 district and is labeled as a CD district for its state grouping factor. The Egg Harbor Township School District is made up of 8 schools. The H.R. Swift School, the E.H. Slaybaugh School, and the C.J. Davenport School all contain kindergarten through 2nd-grade; the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School houses the 3rd- and 4th-grade students; the Intermediate School contains 5th- and 6th-grade students; the Middle School houses the 7th- and 8th-grade students; and the E.H.T. High School has the 9th- through 12th-graders. Lastly, the district has created the Eagle Academy for at-risk middle school and high school-age students. The August 12, 2004, edition of *The Press of Atlantic City* featured an article that noted Egg Harbor Township plans to put forth a referendum on school construction. The article stated, “The initial plans would call for the construction of two elementary schools...” (Harper, 2004, p. 1). In January of 2005, the school district was the beneficiary of a successful referendum. The community passed the referendum by a resounding 90% yes vote. The number of voters eclipsed all budget vote totals in the past decade. This may be due in part to the new “all-call” phone system that alerted all district families of the vote, polling times, and polling places.
The Egg Harbor Township School District’s official Website stated that the district’s educational goal is “to create a system of education that will offer each and every student the opportunity to excel academically and to enjoy the enrichment activities that are important in developing their total well-being.” The Website also stated that the school district has a vision of “all children being empowered, through a blend of traditional and information technology resources, to accomplish the district’s educational goals...lifelong learners will be equipped with the skills to succeed in an information age characterized by constant change.” Students do have many opportunities to succeed and enjoy numerous activities in the district.

The Egg Harbor Township School District has achieved many accomplishments. The Eagle Academy was deemed as one of eight “Star Schools” by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2003. In recent years the H.R. Swift and E.H.T. Middle Schools were honored with the state’s “Best Practices Award.” Several of the district’s schools offer a wide variety of extracurricular activities, many of which have received awards or won championships. The high school offers 14 advanced placement courses. Lastly, the transportation department was recently named as one of the top 50 in the entire country.

With the successes of the district comes the backlash from the rapid growth of the township. Coupled with the recent defeated budget vote is the overcrowding of the schools. The Dr. Joyanne D. Miller School opened in September, 2003. It was built to accommodate 1,100 students and was nearly filled to capacity on opening day. In his narrative about the district in the 2002-2003 New Jersey School Report Card, current superintendent Dr. Philip Heery stated, “For the fifth consecutive year our student
enrollment has increased at a rate approaching 350 students per year, a rate that would suggest that the district plan to build a school every other year.” Dr. Heery recently sent a letter to Governor James E. McGreevey, which is posted on the district’s Web site, that detailed the problems that the state’s Pinelands Commission has brought on the district, along with a request to give the district the money that it is due by the state financing law. In the letter dated January 23, 2003, Dr. Heery stated, “...we need relief from mandated growth, coupled with the current school funding laws.” Dr. Heery also discussed how the growing student population directly affects the district, particularly in light of the budget freeze implemented by the state. In the letter to the governor, Heery stated that the district actually gained 500 new students equating to a need for about 80 new staff members. Due to the budget’s defeat and no increase in state aid, the district was only ably to hire three new teachers. Heery stated, “How can three teachers handle 500 students? We have students attending school in trailers because we can’t build schools fast enough, and our class sizes have grown dangerously large.” In addition, with the budget being defeated again in 2004, important programs and co-curricular activities were cut from the 2004-2005 school year.

The Egg Harbor Township School District has enough space to house 6,952 students. Unfortunately, Dr. Heery expected there to be over 7,000 students in September of 2004 (Harper, 2004, p. 8). The number of teaching faculty members in the district was just under 1,100 and there were 27 administrators. The number of students per administrator was 231.1, which is well above the state average of 165.2. The school’s report card showed that the district spent an average of $8,865 per student ($500 less than the previous school year), well below the state average of $11,313.
The Egg Harbor Township Middle School, where this study was conducted, contains the district's 7th- and 8th-grade students. The total student population of the middle school eclipsed 1,200 during the 2004-2005 school year. The New Jersey School Report Card for 2002-2003 (p. 2) listed the 7th- and 8th-grade student enrollment as 990. That reflects over a 20% increase in the school's population over a two-year period. The school's 8th-grade students who took the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment, also known as the GEPA, fell under the state average in the main two categories of language arts literacy and mathematics. The state average for being "proficient" or "advanced proficient" on the GEPA Language Arts Literacy section was 73.8%, but the school average was 73.5%. In reference to the GEPA Mathematics section, the state average for the 2002-2003 school year was 56.7%, but the Egg Harbor Township 8th-graders were well below that number with only 48.7% being "proficient" or "advanced proficient." Another alarming statistic that can be ascertained from the school report card is the percentage of students suspended for the school during the 2002-2003 school year. While the state average is 4.7%, the Egg Harbor Township Middle School suspended 13.2% of the students. Another alarming fact that is reported in the most recent census is that there were nearly 400 single parents raising children who attended the Egg Harbor Township Middle School.

The Egg Harbor Township Middle School was designed for student success. Completed in 1992, the middle school is formatted to incorporate the "schools-within-schools" model. Martinez & Klopott (2002) have stated that schools designed in this manner were done so to "create a personalized learning experience for the students" (p. 16). The building contains four "houses" of 7th-grade students and four "houses" of 8th-
grade students, thus, creating eight “schools-within-a-school.” This “house” plan also
leads to the probability of increased student success. Ubben, Hughes, & Norris (2001)
have stated that with this type of plan, “…serious discipline problems are significantly
down and attendance is up” (p. 103). The authors also quoted Sizer (1995) who has
stated, “Personalization is the single most important factor that keeps kids in school”
(Ubben, et al., 2001). The Egg Harbor Township Middle School has attempted to
personalize the large building by breaking it up into named “houses” where students are
taught the core subjects in their own pod where minimal travel is needed.

The Egg Harbor Township Middle School provides students with the opportunity
to enroll in honors classes for biology, chemistry, pre-algebra, algebra, French, and
Spanish, along with the core courses. The school participates in a Character Education
Program to promote respect and tolerance. All students have the chance, as long as they
are eligible and have obtained a physical exam from a doctor, to participate on one of the
13 athletic teams (down from the 19 the previous year due to the defeated budget). The
teams compete in the Atlantic-Cape-Cumberland Junior High School League. The school
also offers over a dozen other extracurricular opportunities to the students. These range
from band and chorus to student council and the Builder’s Club, a junior version of the
Key Club at the high school, which is sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club.

The faculty of the Egg Harbor Township Middle School is as diverse as the
township. The 87 teaching faculty members range in age from 23 to 62 and in experience
from rookie teachers to teachers with over 30 years of experience in the field of
year, the student/faculty ratio was 13.0 compared to the state average of 12.2. The
average core class size, though, was 27 students for the 2004-2005 school year. The percentage of building faculty with a Bachelor of Arts Degree was 84.2% during the 2002-2003 school year, while 15.8% held a Master’s degree. The building has three administrators, which creates a student/administrator ratio of 412.3, quite different than the state average of 313.5. For the current school year, the principal is a first-time principal. One of the assistant principals is in her second year as a school administrator, while the other assistant principal is in his first year. The principal is also the sixth principal in the past eight years.

Significance of the Study

The study was done because there has been an increase in the number of new students at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School who have fallen into the category of being ineligible to participate in extracurricular activities. The study was completed to ensure that the number of students eligible to participate in extracurricular activities increases. There is a need for an extra person to confide in and guide the students, an extra friend helping the students to succeed. No such peer mentor program existed in the building or in the district.

Relationship of the Study to the ISLLC Standards

This study provided the opportunity to enhance many skills necessary for becoming an efficient and effective school administrator and school leader. ISLLC Standard 1 can be described as having key points and concepts that deal with the vision and mission of the school. Standard 1 states, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision that is shared and communicated
by the school community.” The knowledge section of this first standard contains the following statement: “The administrator has knowledge and understanding of...research methods.” The research and review of pertinent literature, completed during this study, show that this part of Standard 1 has been achieved. In addition, one of the dispositions of the standard was met. This states, “The administrator believes in, values and is committed to...educability of all.” By giving help to those students who are at-risk or in need of more support, the study attempted to ensure that all were educated as best as possible. Furthermore, under the performances section that accompanies Standard 1, the study has also met this goal. This states, “The administrator facilitates and engages in activities ensuring that there is (are)...shared vision (based on relevant demographic and assessment data for student learning) that shapes the programs, plans and actions for the school.” The study assessed the need for more support for those students who, after reviewing appropriate data, were identified as at-risk to become ineligible to participate in after-school activities.

ISLLC Standard 2 states, “A school administrator is an education 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.” Under the program established by the study, students were able to receive added support and extra help in the learning process. Thus, Standard 2 was met under the dispositions segment, which states, “The administrator believes in, values and is committed to...multiple ways of learning.”

ISLLC Standard 4 is an important standard because it focuses on effective community relations. This is a skill that may often be overlooked by a school
administrator, but it is of utmost importance. Standard 4 states, "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources." The study established a program that brought together varying families and backgrounds in the community to ensure better success academically and, in turn, socially. The work done during the study supports Standard 4 and the knowledge that accompanies it, particularly when it is stated that, "The administrator has knowledge understanding of...current research on schooling." Also, under this standard, the dispositions that go with it were met. This is stated in the standard by the following: "The administrator believes in, values and is committed to...collaboration and communication with informed and caring families and community; involvement in partnership with shared decision making." Also, "The administrator believes in, values and is committed to...community and families providing resources for the enhancement of learning."

Finally, ISLLC Standard 6 supports the work done during the study when it states, "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context." This standard finds its key points centered on the context of public education. Under the supporting dispositions, the work done during the study would achieve the following: "The administrator believes in, values and is committed to...education as a key to opportunity & social mobility."
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Research has shown that students who participate in extracurricular activities are more successful throughout their academic career than those who do not participate in activities. Furthermore, these students who are involved in the nonacademic activities that a school may offer are also more successful in their future endeavors, beyond the school experience. Extracurricular activities also support the missions and visions of schools. According to 2003 survey (p. 1) conducted by the Nation Federation of State High School Associations (the NFHS), extracurricular activities, or cocurricular activities as they are sometimes called, “...are not a diversion but rather an extension of a good educational program.” After-school or extracurricular activities give students the opportunity to go to school for another reason besides academics and to have contact with more positive role models. For those who may not be honor roll students, these types of activities are incentives to attend school. The NFHS survey (p. 2) adds, “Students who participate in activity programs tend to have higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems than students generally.” These are all issues that school administrators are concerned about and need to improve.

Unfortunately, all of the students who participate in extracurricular activities are not totally successful. Even more so, many students become academically ineligible or have mounting discipline problems before they can even begin to participate in an after-school program. The pressures of school or the lack of support at home are too much to overcome. Students who enter school buildings with “extra baggage” need extra support.
Extracurricular activities can provide these "at-risk" students with a needed outlet, with extra peer and adult contact and support, and keep them from going home where trouble may arise. McElroy (2000, p. 1) states that "...adolescents face a wide range of choices...every day they bring events from their out-of-school lives to school with them."
The pressures of school are difficult enough for students who are fortunate enough to have a good support system at home. For those who have parents who work late at night, such as those in the casino business, who don't have the luxury of a two-parent home, or who are even under the guardianship of someone who is not their parent, the pressures of school and the workload can be magnified. Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall, & Gollnick, (2002) reported that only 68% of America's school children under the age of 18 live in a two-parent household. Extracurricular activities represent an opportunity to assist these students and give them a chance at being successful not only at school, but also in their future endeavors. The NFHS survey (p. 2.) reports, "Through participation in activity programs, students learn self-discipline, build self-confidence and develop skills to handle competitive situations...so that they become responsible adults and productive citizens." These characteristics that activities can instill in students are ones that school administrators should envision for their students. Even if the students do not become honor roll students or excel at the collegiate level, one must strive to make them productive members of the community so that they may succeed in whatever field they pursue.

One solution to assisting students who may be at-risk or on the edge is to provide them with a mentor. Bintrim (2001, p.2) defined a mentor as "an advisor, coach, advocate, role model, and trusted friend to the student." The Treasury Board of Canada
has produced a guide for mentoring. This guide defines mentoring as "...a one-to-one relationship based on encouragement, constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect, and a willingness to learn and share" (2000, p. 1). Mentors have been around for some time. The term comes from the ancient story of Odysseus who left his son in the trusting hands of his friend, Mentor (Bintrim, p. 1). But thousands of years later, this trusted friend’s name has become the term for guiding those who are less experienced and in need of support. Kerka (1998, p. 3) quoted Bell (1997) who compared the "mentor’s role...to that of birds guiding their young in leaving the nest..." Work by Toth (1990, p. 1) reported that mentors "...guide and counsel students..." and this extra guidance can, "yield positive benefits." Guiding our young is so important these days with all of the demands, temptations, and influences that surround today’s adolescents. President George W. Bush summed it up perfectly in his January 29, 2002, State of the Union Address, "My call tonight is for every American to commit at least two years, 4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime, to the service of your neighbors...We need mentors to love children..." (Sack, 2002).

Recent research (McElroy, 2000) has examined a middle school in Roswell, Georgia. The Crabapple Middle School was the focus of the study. At this school a mentoring program was established to assist students who were leaving the elementary setting in the district and entering the middle school and to assist the middle school students who were soon to enter the district’s high school. The school even secured a grant to begin the program. The school’s program is called “One-At-A-Time Middle School Mentoring.” The Egg Harbor Township Middle School is in the process of applying for a mentoring grant through the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of...
Safe and Drug-Free Schools. This grant would provide the necessary money to establish a mentor program for at-risk students at the school. The grant is particularly necessary during this era of frozen state aid, as the enrollment numbers continue to skyrocket in the Egg Harbor Township School District.

Disadvantaged students often have a rough time forming proper relationships in school, either with the adults that they come in contact with or with their peers. A mentor can help in forming positive relationships that can head a student in the right direction towards success. Casey (2000, p. 5) stated that mentoring “can significantly contribute to the emotional, social, and vocational development of...adolescents.” Forming positive relationships in schools is often addressed through the development of a character education program or curriculum. The Egg Harbor Township School District initiated a character education program at the Intermediate and Middle Schools several years ago. Its intent was to develop more tolerance and acceptance of peers, while showing respect and working hard for the adults that they come in contact with in the schools. In the state of Arkansas, a statewide character education program has developed in the past few years. Anderson & Blackwood (2000, p. 1) have reported that Arkadelphia High School, in Arkansas, has utilized the state’s character education curriculum and developed a mentoring program. Arkadelphia’s mentor program was designed to help students to cope with their “educational and personal problems, and encourage students to participate in cocurricular activities.” The mentoring program in Arkadelphia is called “M & M” for Mentor/Mentee Program. The main goal of M & M is to help students improve their social skills, as well as their grades and standardized test scores while participating in an extracurricular activity. Anderson & Blackwood (p. 1) stated that the “initial intent was
to make available to every student a significant role model who could address special concerns, such as excessive tardiness, office referrals, excessive noise, and appropriate behavior...."

Administrators, particularly at the high school level, have been concerned with the dropout rate. Lunenburg (2000, p. 3) has completed research about at-risk students and concluded that these students often “perceive that they are treated differently from high-achieving students.” This phenomenon can lead to less desire by the students to attend school. Dondero (1997, p. 2) reported that, “according to Sinik (1990), researchers have found that dropouts often cite the absences of anyone who cared about them as one of the primary reasons for leaving school.” Dondero (p. 1) stated, “Mentoring is a powerful way to provide...contacts for youth who receive little guidance in their schools, homes, communities...mentors serve as beacons of hope for young people adrift in an uncertain world.” Caring, concerned mentors can guide students who do not have the tools necessary to stay active in school activities, keep their grades up, and make the right social decisions.

Often, in the past, adults have been targeted as being the mentor for a student. Powell (1997, p. 1) defines an adult mentor as, “An adult from the community who assists educationally deprived...school students (protégés) to attain grade-level proficiency in basic skills and, as appropriate, learn more advanced skills.” Today, though, there is a push to empower peers to motivate, tutor, and guide. Ultimately, peers would then become the mentor for students who need guidance towards success in school. Powell (p.1) defines a peer tutor as a student who “assists educationally disadvantaged peers (tutees) to attain grade-level proficiency in basic skills and, as
appropriate, learn more advanced skills by assisting with homework assignments,
providing instruction, and fostering good study habits.” The U.S. Department of Justice’s
Office of Justice Programs, in its newsletter *Youth in action* (1999, p. 1), defines peer
mentoring as follows:

- match[ing] older youth with young students in one-on-one relationships to
- provide guidance for the children. Through this special relationship, peer mentors
- provide advice and support and serve as role models for younger people who need
- help. Challenges facing those being mentored include problems with schoolwork;
- social issues, such as pressure to drink or smoke; family problems or tension; and
- other typical difficulties of growing up. A peer mentor can also simply be
- someone for a younger student to hang out with.

This type of mentoring, using a student’s peer, gives the student a positive role model
that is easily accessible and more on their level. This allows students to feel that the
mentor understands what they are going through more than an adult may.

In California’s Kern County, through its Community Action Against Drug and
Alcohol Abuse program (CAADAA), a Peers Empowering Peers (PEP) program has
been developed. This program labels the mentor as a “peer helper.” Like a peer mentor,
according to the “Peer Helping” link on the CAADAA Web site (p. 1), a peer helper
helps students “solve problems, mediate conflicts, or get academic help through
tutoring…Peer helpers develop important life skills to make healthy choices and be
successful people.” Providing students that are at-risk and in need of guidance with
another person in whom they can confide and to whom they can look for direction gives
the student a better chance at being successful in school, as well as being able to
participate in extracurricular activities, where they can gain more contact with positive role models and receive positive reinforcement.

The Byrne Foundation, in the Denver, Colorado area, has developed the Peer Mentoring Program. According to the foundation's Website (p. 1), the program "serves as a stepping stone between middle school and high school..." Peer mentors in the foundation's program are students who have "received special training on how to effectively tutor, communicate, and support a younger youth...The mentor agrees to serve as a role model for the middle-school student, while providing them academic support..." Students making the transition from one level or one school to the next so often need extra academic and social support. This is especially true if they want to remain academically eligible to participate in activities and remain successful.

Mayes (1999, p. 6) created the School Family Program, which is a two-period-a-week program to assist younger students by pairing them up with older students. The idea for the program came from the building principal's quest to help students make the transition from the elementary level to the middle school level:

He was concerned because typically younger students went through some emotional turmoil over the transition coming from an individual classroom in which they had their own desks and a single teacher to an environment in which they had to change classes nine times a day, had many different teachers, had to handle keeping their materials in a locker, and share the halls with students who were usually a foot taller than they! (Mayes, p. 5)

This transition sounds very similar to the one that students in Egg Harbor Township face when they are promoted from the sixth grade in the Intermediate School to the seventh
grade in the Middle School. Many become lost in the shuffle of the day and cannot cope with the new procedures and requirements. Simply remembering to get a pencil, book, or homework paper from their locker, along with other new responsibilities become difficulties as the students make the transition from the elementary setting to the middle school setting.

Ensinger, executive director of Mentoring Partnerships of New York, has been quoted by Bintrim (2001, p. 2), “School-sponsored mentoring is a ‘success-based strategy’ to help young people develop self-esteem and personal growth.” The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1998, p.1) has reported that mentoring “is one way schools can provide students more individual attention and ensure they aren’t left to face...challenges alone.” At the same time, just as important, the Youth in action newsletter states that peer mentoring “can mean the difference between dropping out of school and graduating, or between getting involved with drugs and developing the strength and confidence to resist such pressures” (p. 1), which is an important thought for all educators.

Research has shown the need for mentors. The Byrne Foundation’s Peer Mentoring Program identifies students who are “on the edge” (p. 3). The foundation attempts to assist those students deemed to be on the edge to attain better study skills, better strategies for completing homework assignments, better ways to motivate the students, and an extra support person to achieve these skills. Lack of these skills, the foundation feels, is what causes some students to teeter on the edge of failure or success. A guidebook published by the U.S. Department of Education entitled Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide (1996, p. 1) stated that the Carnegie Foundation
completed a study in 1992 that discovered “only 60 percent of an adolescent’s nonsleeping time is taken up by school, homework, chores, meals, or employment.” The study also determined that the rest of the adolescent’s free time was spent without positive adult supervision. This lack of adult supervision or lack of adequate role models can lead to negative or destructive behavior. Having a role model, a mentor, can supply the students with better alternatives than to be home alone. The guidebook stressed the importance of giving students activities after school to deter bad behaviors that may occur after school hours. It reported, “It is not surprising, therefore, that most acts of juvenile delinquency take place at the close of the school day, when opportunities for constructive activities are too often unavailable” (p. 1). Extracurricular activities can be the supervised, constructive activity that at-risk students need. The guidebook added, “...there is growing belief that mentoring can, in many instances, help young people change direction and do better academically and socially” (p. 1). Improving academics, social skills, and decision-making is an important outcome that mentoring tries to achieve.

Work by Powell (1997, p. 4) has noted that important goals for mentoring programs focus on improving basic academic and study skills; preventing students from dropping out and improving attendance; building confidence and self-esteem; improving the transition from grade level to grade level and from building to building; and developing skills need for the job market. This is important that the students learn lifetime skills, not just ones to help them through their academic careers.

Bintrim (2001, p. 2) has quoted Susan Weinberger, president of the Mentoring Consulting Group in Norwalk, Connecticut, who has said, “Mentoring is not an issue of
should we do this. It’s a question of how will we do this.” This is just as important as identifying those students in need of a mentor. If students are identified, but the proper procedures are not put into place, then the students are destined to still teeter on the edge.

The Byrne Foundation’s Peer Mentoring Program has stressed the importance of involving the family of the students being mentored. The foundation’s program outline (p. 5) claims that in order to succeed, mentoring programs must be a “TEAM EFFORT between...the middle and high school students, the family, and the school systems. Everyone is needed to help ensure that each student is able to reach his or her fullest capability.” The family must grant permission before mentoring can even begin, and it must be a total collaboration to meet its fullest potential.

The Youth in action newsletter (1999, p. 3), published by the U.S. Department of Justice, has recommended speaking with the parents or guardians of those students involved so that they understand the “commitment of the program.” The newsletter also highlights the importance of having the mentors meet routinely with their peers and stay “absolutely committed to keeping those appointments” (1999, p. 3). Commitment, dedication, and a willingness to succeed are not only needed, but also the goals and anticipated outcomes of a peer mentoring program.

Following the selection process the next important procedure in a peer mentoring program is training the mentors. Powell (1997) evaluated data from 31 California school districts with peer mentoring programs, examining 591 peer mentors. One of the most important factors, determined through this study, was selecting and matching learners with the proper peers. The study listed several factors that were essential in pairing students together. These factors ranged from the ability to work together to similarity of
cultural background to same gender pairing (p. 7). Flaxman & Ascher (1992), as reported in the Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide (1996), found that “more subtle characteristics like caretaking or nurturing styles, energy levels and approach to adventure, or rigidity versus a tolerance for ambiguity and conflict may be better indicators of why relationships flourish or falter” (p. 2). The guide can be extremely helpful as it lists numerous steps to take when establishing a mentoring program, from the setup to the assessment to the evaluation. A mentoring program must be monitored and follow the proper procedures for it to succeed, thus allowing students to stay on track, out of trouble, eligible to participate in extracurricular activities, and geared for a successful career when they leave their academic settings.

Research Questions

The previous literature review examined middle school students and how peer mentoring can guide students in an educational setting. It looked at how at-risk students’ grades, school attendance, and discipline incidences were affected by having a caring peer or mentor to assist them in making the transition from 7th-grade to 8th-grade. The following research examined the effect that 8th-grade student mentors had on 7th-grade at-risk students at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School. The ultimate question that was to be answered by this study was whether providing a partner, a guide, and more importantly a mentor would improve the school year for at-risk 7th-grade students. Subquestions or more specific questions addressed by the study include the following:

Did grades improve for the at-risk students after being assigned a mentor? Did the at-risk students’ attendance at school improve after being assigned a mentor? Did the incidences of discipline referrals improve for the at-risk students after being assigned a mentor? One
other question evolved as the study progressed: How did the mentoring responsibility impact the mentor? Each of these questions was answered and evaluated.
CHAPTER 3
The Design of the Study

Description of Research Design

The research design for this study followed the format for a traditional research project. The study involved quantitative research as it described numbers such as the grades of students, school attendance records, disciplinary referrals, and information gathered from the students’ teachers and activity advisors and coaches. It was descriptive in nature due to the collecting of grades prior to and following the process of creating the group study.

Research Instruments

This study utilized conversations with the teachers who are responsible for the students involved in the study, whether they were the students’ classroom teachers or extracurricular activities advisors and coaches. Material culture was also examined both to choose the students involved and to evaluate the progress of the group.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Through the cooperation of the Egg Harbor Township Middle School administrative staff and guidance staff, 35 students were identified as being at-risk students who were or wanted to be involved in at least one type of extracurricular activity. The same school staff members also identified 35 students who have been successful in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. Permission was received from the parents and/or guardians of each of the mentors participating in the study. From the group of students identified as at-risk a systematic sampling was created. McMillan (2000, p. 105) has stated that a systematic sampling is when “every nth element is
selected from a list of all elements of the population, beginning with a randomly selected
element.” The population of 35 at-risk students was narrowed down to 12 students from
an alphabetical list using the systematic sampling approach. McMillan (p. 106) has
stated that these types of lists are “suitable for choosing subjects systematically.” The 12
students were an even number of female and male students.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were several types of data used in this study. All data was obtained after
receiving permission from school administration. Academic grades were the first type of
data that was examined. Each of the subject’s grades were collected for the first marking
period, after they had been deemed academically ineligible (placed on the “ineligible
list”) to participate in extracurricular activities or close to being ineligible. This would
cause the students to be considered at-risk. Numerical grades for the six academic
courses that all subjects were enrolled in were examined. These courses consisted of
science, language arts, literature, mathematics, social studies, and physical
education/health. Additional data that was gathered at the end of the first marking period
was the attendance records, discipline records, and interviews with teachers of the study’s
subjects.

After the sampling group was established, the subjects were assigned a peer
mentor for the second marking period, as well as subsequent marking periods. The
grades of each of the subjects were then examined after the third marking period.
Attendance records, discipline records, and more teacher interviews were also studied.
These additional records helped to determine how the subjects’ attendance and behavior
had improved after being mentored by a peer.
Changes in grades were calculated by using a plus/minus system. Grades were compared from the first marking period with those grades earned for the third marking period. Each of the subjects was given a final plus or minus number to determine how the grades had changed after being paired with a peer mentor. For example, if a subject’s science grade was a 77 for the first marking period and a 92 in the second marking period, then the subject was given a “plus 15.” A plus or minus number was calculated for each of the six evaluated courses to establish a final plus/minus figure. The data on grades would help to determine if grades improved for the at-risk students following being paired with a peer mentor.

Attendance records were also examined for the study. Attendance records were accumulated from the first marking period and then compared to the attendance records for the second and third marking periods. If a day that a student was absent was labeled with “Doctor’s Note” on the attendance record, that absence was not included in the totals. The data collected on attendance would help to show how the at-risk students’ attendance changed after being paired with a peer mentor.

Discipline records were collected and evaluated for each of the at-risk students involved in the study. Discipline records were obtained following the first marking period. These records were compared with the discipline records for the second and third marking periods. These records would assist in determining if incidences of behavior referrals changed after being paired up with a peer mentor.

Lastly, the 8th-grade peer mentors were administered a survey about the work that they had done. This was done to see what impact being a school leader had on them. The survey used was one similar to that created by Reglin (1998) to evaluate the reaction
of mentors to a mentoring program. Altering Reglin's survey, the survey for this study was shorter and more pertinent to the mentoring done by the students. The survey utilized a Likert Scale and was given to each of the 8th-grade peer mentors at the end of the study (see Appendix).
CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Research Findings

Findings

The first research question to be studied was whether or not the grades of the subjects improved after being paired with an 8th-grade peer mentor. Report cards were obtained from the guidance counselor of each of the at-risk students. The report cards from the first marking period were analyzed and compared with the report cards from the third marking period. The subjects’ plus/minus data can be found in Table 1. The changes in the subjects’ grades, using the aforementioned method (see Data Collection and Analysis section), ranged from a plus 91 to a minus 36. There were seven subjects with numbers in the plus range and five subjects with numbers in the minus range.

Table 1 Plus/Minus Data For 7th-Grade Students

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Following the first marking period, five of the subjects were on the ineligible list. Two of those subjects became eligible and both improved from four failing grades in the core subjects to no failing grades in the core subjects. One of the originally ineligible
subjects, who was paired with a member of the wrestling and track teams, became eligible during the time that he was mentored and participated on the wrestling and track teams. That subject not only became a member of the team, but also became a starter on both teams and helped lead the wrestling team to a league championship and earned himself a second place finish in the league individual competition. In addition, the mentor became one of the vital team leaders of the championship wrestling team and captured a first place title in the individual competition.

The second research question that was examined was how attendance had changed for the subjects. See Table 2 for attendance data. The attendance records were obtained from the attendance secretary. The records of the first marking period were studied and compared to the records of the second and third marking periods. The records revealed that nine of the subjects reduced the number of absences during the time period when they were being mentored. Two of the subjects’ attendance records were identical for the time period before and during the mentoring program. Only one of the subjects was absent more after receiving a peer mentor.

Table 2  Absences From The 1st Marking Period (M.P.) vs. Absences While Mentored
The third research question that was analyzed was the changes in incidences of behavior referrals. Table 3 illustrates the discipline data. Discipline records were obtained from the assistant principal. Discipline records were analyzed in order to determine if there had been a change in behavior, that is, whether behavior had improved since the peer mentors began to work with the subjects. The records of the first marking period (and, in some cases, the previous school year) were compared with the records of the second and third marking periods. The data obtained showed that five of the subjects had not been referred to the administration for behavior problems before being paired up with a peer mentor. Those five subjects did not have any behavioral issues during the mentoring. Six subjects improved their behavior after being mentored by a peer. One subject had more discipline after being mentored.

Table 3  Discipline Referrals From The 1st Marking Period (M.P.) vs. During Mentoring

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<th>Subject</th>
<th>1st M.P.</th>
<th>During Mentoring</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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The fourth question that was analyzed was how the mentoring program had impacted the 8th-grade mentors. The results of the survey (copy of the survey can be

33
found in the Appendix) given to the mentors can be found in Table 4A and Table 4B. The Likert Scale used in the survey helped to amass the data from the returned surveys. The surveys of the mentors whose mentees were part of the group study revealed that all of the mentors felt that the program was a positive influence on the at-risk students. The surveys revealed that nearly 75% of the mentors felt that their mentee had made at least satisfactory improvement after being mentored.

Table 4A Results Of The Mentor Survey (Questions in the Appendix)

Table 4B Results Of The Mentor Survey (Questions in the Appendix)
Interpretation of Findings

The findings show that the peer mentoring program at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School had a positive influence on most of the participants. Those subjects that saw an improvement in their grades, that is a “plus” total after the third marking period, were 58% of the sampling. This finding is similar and consistent with the findings of a study done by Reglin (1998) who discovered that 51% of the subjects in the study increased at least half a letter grade in English and mathematics. The results of the current study are also consistent with the findings of a Proctor & Gamble report (2001), found on the mentoring page of Northside Independent School District’s Web site (p. 1), which stated that grade point averages rose almost half a point when students were paired up with a mentor. The report also found that those mentored are “more likely to stay in school, achieve better grades, and continue on to college” (p. 1).

Most of the subjects in the study attended school more frequently. By giving the subjects someone who would routinely check on them, sometimes simply asking how their day was going, seemed to lead to the subjects attending school more often. Sometimes an extra caring person, who shows an interest in a student, can cause that student to want to be in school. As the student begins to experience a feeling of being wanted, to experience some success in the classroom, and experience extracurricular activities, they will begin to want to be in school. One subject in the study became a successful participant in the athletic program, did not miss a day of school while being mentored, and received the Academic Effort Award for the third marking period (this award is given to a student who does not make the honor roll, but shows significant improvement in grades and effort). These findings are consistent with the findings of a
Public/Private Venture (1992 & 1993) study. The findings of this study can be found on the Web site of Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida, Inc. The Web site (p. 1) stated that students who have an older, caring individual working with them, such as a mentor, are 52% less likely to skip school and 57% less likely to skip class while in school.

Most of the subjects had a decrease in the incidences of bad behavior. As with attendance, with a caring and guiding mentor, students want to be in school more. By wanting to be in school more and wanting to participate in extracurricular activities, students will make better decisions and be disciplined less. The findings of this study are consistent with the finding reported on the Web site of the Rutland Area Mentoring Network. The network reported that students who are provided with a mentor were 39% less likely to participate in violent acts, 46% less likely to use drugs, and 27% less likely to begin using alcohol (p.1).

Results from the survey given to the mentors are consistent with the results obtained in a study by Anderson & Blackwood (2000, p. 1). Their study found that 62% of the mentors felt that the mentoring program was a positive experience for all of the participants. The current study found that nearly 75% of the mentors felt that the program was positive for both the 7th-grade students and the 8th-grade students. Most of the at-risk 7th-grade students and all of the 8th-grade mentors felt that the peer mentoring program was a good experience and impacted their lives in a positive way. One mentor, after being chosen as a mentor excelled on the wrestling team, became a pivotal team leader, and won his weight class in the league’s individual championship. At-risk students were not the only beneficiaries of the peer mentoring program.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Introduction

The peer mentoring program that was established for the study was a new program for the Egg Harbor Township Middle School. Teachers have acted as mentors for at-risk students in the building since 1999. This was the first time that students were given the opportunity to mentor their peers. Getting the program off of the ground was difficult at the start. Training the 8th-grade mentors was not an easy task, particularly since many of the mentors already had a rigorous daily schedule. Training materials had to be obtained and training sessions had to be secured. A mini-grant from the Egg Harbor Township Educational Foundation allowed the program to get off of the ground. The program that evolved was called Peers Helping and Assisting Teammates, or P.H.A.T.

Once the 8th-grade students learned of the importance of becoming a school leader and realized the opportunities that becoming a mentor had, they were more than willing to lend their time to the program. The 8th-grade mentors began to take ownership in the program, while all along aiding and assisting those 7th-grade at-risk students who really needed a shoulder to lean on, advice, guidance, and a good example of how to be successful in school and in extracurricular activities. The mentoring program at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School had a profound effect on almost every individual involved and will continue to impact those involved in the future.
Grades, Attendance, and Behavior

For more than half of the subjects in the sampling grades improved. If only one student became eligible that was ineligible or if only one student improved their grades, then the program was a success. If only one student showed an improvement in attendance, then the program was a success. Likewise, if only one student showed an improvement in behavior, then the program was a success. Any time a student is experiencing difficulties, either in the classroom or socially, and then begins to experience success in school it is a winning situation. Though educational research may not be a perfect science, the peer mentoring program made the school experience a little easier for the subjects in the sampling. All of the successes and improvements cannot be solely attributed to the mentors, as there are variables that cannot be accounted for. Likewise, those mentors who experienced difficulties improving their students may look to outside variables for the lack of improvement. With that in mind, the failures of the program cannot be solely attributed to the work done by the mentors. Students have so many influences in their lives, influences that mentors and educators have no control over.

Leadership

The peer mentoring program that was established and examined in the study empowered the 8th-grade mentors. The program gave them the opportunity to become leaders in the school and to be positive role models for students who may be lacking positive influences in their lives. While they were improving the school experience for the at-risk students, they were also improving their school experience. Many of the mentors become more aware of their ability to help others and to contribute to the
community. In addition, leadership skills were also improved for the director of the program. The study showed the importance of ISLLC Standard 2, which states, "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...."

Change

Much of the information already discussed has talked about changes made in the Egg Harbor Township Middle School. The school and the district now have a model for peer mentoring. Those that have been trained can take their skills with them to the next level and may eventually become someone the at-risk students seek out when they reach the high school level. The program has the potential to become bigger and involve more students at more levels. Helping students make the transition from one building to the next can lead to better success and better experiences for all involved. Getting students involved in extracurricular activities keeps them busy and near positive influences. The U.S. Department of Education released a report that it called Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide in September of 1996. This report stressed the importance of mentoring students. The guide presented a study conducted by the Carnegie Foundation (1992) that stated, "40% of a student’s non-sleeping time is spent unsupervised..." (p. 1). Students that go home after school, to an unsupervised home, are more likely to participate in destructive behavior and not complete their schoolwork. Positive role models, such as mentors, can change a student’s life. The mentors can help to improve grades and get them involved in an extracurricular activity.
Further Study

Future studies focused on mentoring should involve the families of the at-risk students. When students do not have the support that they need at home or do not have an adult following up on the students' schoolwork and activities, the students have less chance to experience success. Getting family members involved will allow the mentor to be more successful. Also, more time is needed for training of mentors. Mentors and the students that they will be advising need some time together to get to know each other. A 1993 edition of the Consumer Guide, produced by the U.S. Department of Education, called the importance of matching mentors with their mentees as "the heart of all programs" (p. 1). The results of mentoring most often will not occur immediately. More time is needed in future studies to assess the value and the success of a mentoring program. A larger sampling, that is, more subjects should be examined in further studies on mentoring and its impact.
References


Heery, P. In a lecture given on September 1, 2004 at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School.


Appendix
Dear Parents/Guardians

Because of your child’s leadership ability, he/she has been chosen to participate in a peer-mentoring program at the Egg Harbor Township Middle School. Each 8th-grade student who has been chosen will provide a 7th-grade student with guidance throughout the remainder of the school year. Funding for this program will come from a mini-grant that I have been awarded. Also, information about the successes of the program may be used in my Master’s thesis along with input from your child, such as a survey.

The program has two purposes. The 7th-grade student that your child will be mentoring will now have an extra “buddy” to help them make the adjustment from the elementary level to a totally new environment at the middle school level. I believe that your child has the potential to be a good role model for a younger student. For your child, this program will provide an opportunity to explore and develop leadership skills. Typically, knowledge is attained while students sit at their desks, listen to their teachers, and work on their schoolwork. Attaining leadership skills, however, requires participating in situations in which personal skills can be developed.

Before mentoring begins, your child will meet briefly with the guidance staff and myself to explain their roles, discuss leadership skills, and detail the program. This program will provide your child with an excellent experience that they can benefit from and use at the high school level and even list as an important activity when applying to colleges. Meetings will occur both during and after school, under adult supervision.

If you need additional information, please feel free to contact me at either hainesg@eht.k12.nj.us or 383-3355, ext. 1584.

Sincerely,

Geoff Haines (teacher and administrative intern)

_____ I give permission for __________________________ to participate in the program.

_____ I do not give permission for __________________________ to participate in the program.

_________________________________________ (Parent/Guardian Signature)
The 8th-grade mentor program has been developed in part because of a concern for the emotional turmoil many of the younger students go through in adjusting from an elementary school to a middle school. The transition involves students changing from having one classroom, one desk, and one teacher, to having several classrooms, lockers, multiple desks, and many teachers. The 7th-grade students that will benefit from the mentor program are often further intimidated because the older students are larger and more mature. The goal of the mentor program is to develop a program to facilitate that transition, making the 7th-grade year a little easier. The mediation program (resuscitated after several years) will help students at all levels to help solve their own problems.

There was also a belief that the school also had another need. Many of the students in our building have potential to be leaders. Without the knowledge of proper leadership skills or how to use these skills, their potential cannot be met. It is my belief that these students should be given the opportunity to exercise these skills. These programs will help to satisfy these needs and attempt to lessen the institutional aspects of a public school. Also, it will assist myself and those other staff members involved to become even better educators of those in our charge.

The following students have been chosen to be mentors and mediators in our building and, hopefully, it will continue for them in the future. Also, this program can be expanded and begin at the start of each school year, making the start of a school year smoother for many. Each student has received parental permission. Training will be Tuesday, from 9:00 to approximately 12:00. Please excuse these students to the auditorium at 9:00 AM on Tuesday. They have been told to obtain all of the work that they will miss. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.
Thank you for choosing to participate in the mentor and mediator programs. You were chosen to participate in these programs for several reasons. You have demonstrated that you are able to earn good grades while participating in many extra-curricular activities. Teachers have recognized this and also feel that you have the potential to be leaders. Like any ability, leadership grows and improves only in response to situations or opportunities in which it can be exercised. The mentor and mediator programs will provide those opportunities for you.

The mentor program originated because of concern about the emotional turmoil of our incoming 7th-grade students. They experience a tough process of adjusting from an elementary school to a middle school. They must now change from having one classroom, one desk, and one teacher, to having several classrooms, lockers, several desks, and many teachers. The 7th-graders are sometimes intimidated because many of the older students are bigger and more mature. The purpose of the mentor program is to facilitate this transition.

I felt our school had another need, too. You and many of our 8th-graders have potential leadership skills. I believe that you must have the opportunity to exercise those skills. So, here is your chance. We will be training on Tuesday. You will leave 2nd period and go to the auditorium where we will meet and discuss your roles, etc. I plan on finishing the training around noon. You will return to class at that time or to lunch, if you missed your lunch. Please remember that you are to obtain any work that you may miss. Check with the teachers of the classes that you will miss to see what you need to do. I, and the other staff members, look forward to seeing you this Tuesday for the training session.
MEMO

TO: 8th-Grade Mentors
FROM: Mr. Haines
RE: Your 7th-Grade Student

Once again I would like to thank you for your interest in assisting our 7th-grade students who need an extra friend in the building. Below you will find the name of the student that you are being asked to keep an eye on, assist, guide, befriend, tutor…mentor for the remainder of the school year and, hopefully, when you meet again at the high school. If you have any questions please feel free to see me any time during the school day. We appreciate your help.

8th-Grade Student ______________________

7th-Grade Students ______________________ Homeroom ________
HOMEROOM HALL PASS

Please allow this student to leave homeroom to visit their 7th-grade mentee for the remainder of the school year. He/she has been chosen as one of the 8th-grade peer mentors, working with some of our 7th-grade students. Thank you for your assistance in the program.

Mr. Haines
MEMO

TO: 7th-Grade Homeroom Teachers
FROM: Geoff Haines, Administrative Intern
RE: Peer Mentor Program

I would like to inform you that __________________________ has been chosen to participate in the Peer Mentor Program. Please be advised that at various times during the school day, particularly AM or PM Homeroom, they will be visited by the following 8th-grade peer mentor(s):

Thank you for your consideration and assistance in this program. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions please let me know.
SURVEY

Mentor’s Evaluation of the Mentoring Program

DIRECTIONS: Use the following scale to answer the questions below:

1 = Poor  2 = OK  3 = Satisfactory  4 = Good  5 = Outstanding

1. _____ My student showed an improvement in their study habits.

2. _____ My student showed an increased interest in achieving good grades.

3. _____ My student has a better attitude, now, about school.

4. _____ Rate the influence that you think you had on your student.

Please comment on the mentoring program: