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A MENTOR PROGRAM STUDY
AT THE PENNSAUKEN CAMPUS OF
CAMDEN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

by
Fredrica MacDonough

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate School of
Rowan University
April 14, 1998

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved April 30, 1998

ABSTRACT

MacDonough, Fredrica

**A Mentor Program Study at the
Pennsauken Campus of
Camden County Technical Schools,
1998, Advisor: Dr. Theodore
Johnson, School Administration**

Mentoring many at-risk students who benefit from contact with teachers and other faculty members, the ten-year-old program at the Pennsauken Campus of Camden County Technical school needed change and improvement.

The study identified students who had ability but did not succeed in school because of discipline, attendance, or academic reasons.

Previously only freshmen were initially included in the program, but this study included upper class students in need of mentoring and encouraged additional mentors to participate.

Mentors and students were paired and met either daily or twice monthly. Each month the intern collected brief reports of the meetings and met with mentors when necessary to discuss ideas and problems.

Mentors monitored student progress in classes, student attendance and any discipline problems. The intern followed up on each faculty member by personal contact with mentors on a regular basis. A comparison between the progress of students seen on a daily basis and those seen once a month was made, and a comparison of grades from one year to the next was made. Discipline and attendance records were also examined. A survey of mentors was also taken, and an end of the year report was compiled.

The study concluded that the mentoring program was of benefit to “at-risk” students because an improvement was demonstrated in all areas of school life.

MINI-ABSTRACT

MacDonough, Fredrica

A Mentor Program Study
at the Pennsauken Campus of
Camden County Technical Schools,
1998, Advisor: Dr. Theodore
Johnson, School Administration

The mentor program at CCTS, although in existence for ten years, needed to be improved and changed. At-risk students who had the ability to succeed but were not succeeding because of discipline, attendance, or academic reasons needed to be identified and mentored.

The study concluded that at-risk students included in the mentoring program showed improvement in all areas of school life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FOCUS OF THE STUDY

For approximately ten years, Camden County Technical Schools has had a volunteer mentor program in which at-risk students are coupled with willing teachers who mentor the students throughout their stay in the school. Currently, only entering freshmen are selected as new students to be mentored, and then each student is mentored through his/her senior year. Of approximately ninety staff members, fourteen teachers and other staff members have volunteered to be mentors up to the present time. Each staff member who volunteers mentors one or more students. Usually, no one is permitted to mentor more than two students because it is felt that the one-on-one contact might be lost, and students would not longer benefit from the association. Teachers are currently given guidelines for mentoring. Mainly, they meet with students a minimum of twice a month and record the meetings on a form in a folder, which is given to an assistant principal once a month for review. Many staff members who mentor students are in contact with the students on a daily basis and make an effort to monitor the students' progress in classes, settle disputes or problems students might be having, and meet with other faculty members about the students if necessary.

This program has been successful in the ten years it has been in existence, but the focus of the study is the need to improve it even more. The intention is to expand the program to include more mentors, and since the district has changed its admission

requirements and now seems to have fewer students who can be considered at-risk, the program seeks to include at-risk upperclassmen as new participants in the mentor program. The upperclassmen will then be mentored throughout their stay in the school.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This mentor program, although successful, needs to be improved and expanded. First, the program needs more staff volunteers to mentor so that more students who are at-risk and in need can be mentored. Second, these mentors need to be encouraged to meet more frequently with the students they are mentoring to keep a closer track on their success. Third, the program needs to include upperclassmen who have the potential to succeed but are not succeeding because they have attendance, discipline, or academic problems.

PRODUCT OUTCOME STATEMENT

The current mentoring program at CCTS will be expanded and modified by encouraging more teachers to participate as mentors and by determining the needs of additional students, both freshmen and upperclassmen, and including them in the mentor program.

Through the mentor program, the intern will develop effective decision-making techniques in evaluating the program for changes, communication skills through personal interaction with teachers and students, the ability to listen actively and to respond to the ideas and opinions of others, skills necessary to evaluate student needs, skills necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and the ability to make adjustments as needed so that the program is more effective.

As a result of the mentor program and its changes, CCTS students will have more personal contact with teachers resulting in better attendance, fewer discipline problems,

and greater academic achievement.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Current literature certainly supports the well-known fact that schools face many risks that were not even known just twenty years ago. Increased violence, high drop out rates, and students who seem unable to survive and succeed are among the problems that schools face. Mentoring of students has proven to be one method of helping at-risk students succeed in spite of the many obstacles placed in their way. Having an adult in a student's life is definitely important (Sommerfield, 1996). Therefore, the mentoring program at CCTS is very important to our at-risk students. These students benefit from the contact with teachers and other staff members, who often seem to be the only people who care about them in their lives. In the ten years that this program has been in effect at CCTS, most of the students who have been mentored have graduated successfully from our school. Others have been helped because they have been identified as special needs students and have been appropriately placed in CCTS's Special Needs Division. Few have dropped out of school.

Although the program has been successful over the years, there is a need for change and improvement. First, it is important to identify students who have the ability to succeed but are not succeeding because of discipline, attendance, or academic reasons. New "candidates" who are not freshmen can benefit from the mentoring program. This is the first change that should be made. More staff members should be encouraged to participate in the program as mentors. Shop teachers in particular are in a position to be successful in mentoring students because students spend four class periods each day with the shop teachers. Shop teachers should be encouraged to participate and can be paired

with students who are in their shop.

Changes need to be made in this important program for at-risk students because more students can benefit from the changes. The changes in the mentoring system can benefit the school as a whole because attendance will be improved, fewer students will be suspended, and perhaps through encouragement, more academic achievement will result.

DEFINITIONS

The only terms that need to be defined in this study are at-risk students and mentors. At-risk students are identified as those students who are not succeeding in school because they have attendance, discipline, or academic problems. These are students who have the potential to succeed but do not because of intervening factors that perhaps they bring with them to school. Many of these students come from unstable homes or homes where they have more responsibility than a teenager should have. These home problems prevent them from attending school on a regular basis and from achieving academically. No one at home encourages these students to attend school regularly or to do their school work. They become discipline problems because they need to “prove something” to their peers or to themselves.

Mentors are those who volunteer to work with these at-risk students under the guidelines given to them by the school. They work with students on an individual basis, discuss with the student's other teachers any problems the student might be having in class, and attempt to keep open the lines of communication with the student.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of this study must include the participation of the mentors. Some mentors will not find the time to make more than the minimum contact of twice a month

with the students while others will make every effort to meet much more frequently with the students. Therefore, although a comparison can be made between those students who are seen twice a month with those who are seen weekly, these results may not necessarily be generalizable. One method may or may not be better than the other because of the varying problems and personalities of the students involved in the program. Also, success with this mentoring program in helping our at-risk students at the Pennsauken Campus of Camden County Technical Schools is also not generalizable to our other school in our district because the students drawn from varying socioeconomic situations are quite different.

Changes in this program are also limited by the number of volunteers who participate. Some changes might be very evident, but if not enough people volunteer, there will continue to be a limited number of students who benefit from the study.

SETTING OF THE STUDY

Camden County Vocational and Technical Schools opened its doors at the Pennsauken Campus in 1928 providing opportunities in 12 trade areas and has since grown into one of the largest and most comprehensive vocational-technical districts in the United States. Initially, the Pennsauken Campus and later the Gloucester Township Campus were strictly county vocational schools issuing certificates to its graduates, but in 1960 the school became a four-year high school issuing diplomas instead of certificates to its graduates.

Today the entire district has two campuses, the original campus in Pennsauken and the Gloucester Township Campus, and approximately 5000 county residents take advantage of tuition-free training opportunities.

The staff consists of administrators, teachers, pupil personnel services, secretarial, custodial, and paraprofessionals. The Pennsauken Campus consists of approximately 70 teaching faculty. Twenty career area teachers are providing instruction in ten career areas. All career area teachers have successful experience in industry. The remainder are academic teachers. In addition to training in the career areas, students have classes in English, history, mathematics, physical education and health, and science. At this time, no electives, such as foreign language, are offered to students.

The two schools within the district draw from diverse populations; the Pennsauken Campus, with which this study is concerned, draws primarily from the urban areas of Camden City and Pennsauken with a few students coming from Lawnside and Gloucester City while the Gloucester Township Campus draws students from more rural and suburban areas of Black Horse Pike Regional, Audubon, Collingswood, and Lower Camden County.

The community from which the students at the Pennsauken Campus are drawn is economically depressed. Approximately 74% of the students at the Pennsauken Campus have filled out applications for the free or reduced lunch program, and 65% of these students are entitled to a free lunch. Many of the students come from one-parent families and many from families where English is not spoken.

Presently, the district consists of day high school divisions at both campuses, a Special Needs Division at Gloucester Township, and a Technical Institute (Adult Division). In the two day high school divisions there are approximately 1300 students, 671 of whom attend school at the Pennsauken Campus. The racial breakdown of the Pennsauken campus is 35% Black, 4% White, 59% Hispanic, and 2% Asian.

Before 1995, students were admitted to Camden County Vocational Technical Schools on a first-come, first-served basis. Because of this policy, most of the students who were admitted to this school district needed remediation in most of their academic subject areas. In July 1996, the name of the school changed from Camden County Vocational Technical Schools to Camden County Technical Schools. Beginning in 1996, the standards for admission were changed, affecting incoming freshmen and sophomores to the school. According to R. Sanders Haldeman, superintendent of schools, "Admission standards are needed because there is not enough time in the school day to provide occupational training to students who require extensive remediation. Students who graduate from our programs must take state-sponsored occupational competency tests and they must be able to read and compute to qualify for today's job market." (Golt, 1996).

As a result of the new admission standards, students who are applying to CCTS are required to score in the top 40th percentile on the CAT 5 survey to qualify for entrance into any high school career program. Students who score in the 20-39th percentile qualify for entrance into all programs except computerized electrical technology, drafting, electric, electronics, heating, ventilation and air conditioning. A score below the 20th percentile may mean that the student will not be accepted for admission into the high school program. These students have their applications reviewed along with other data, such as grades, attendance, and other test results to determine a proper placement (H.S. Admissions, 1996). With these new admissions standards, the district has eliminated and reduced some program areas, such as welding, plumbing and machine shop. R. Sanders Haldeman, superintendent of schools said, "We don't want to

train people for jobs that don't exist." (Inquirer, 4/18/96).

Camden County Technical Schools has undergone a myriad of changes since it first opened in 1928, and it continues to make changes to meet the needs of our changing society. It is a district whose primary purpose is to train students for our work world. Changing from a "first-come, first-served" institution to one where students display a capability for the jobs of today is an important step for the school and for the success of the students who enter and graduate from this district.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A successful mentor program will help ensure the achievement of students who are at-risk for accomplishing goals in school. Students who have attendance, discipline, and/or academic problem need the guidance of an adult who will take a personal interest in their success. Since schools are facing problems that did not exist two decades ago, all schools are looking for solutions. It is important to identify at-risk students and to develop programs to prevent students from dropping out of school. Presently, over 25 percent of high school students drop out of school before graduation (Donnelly, 1987). Students who are at-risk in many cases are simply continually disciplined, and it has been found that this negative discipline is not preventing students from dropping out of school. Instead, programs which provide support, such as mentoring, are being put in place. Students who are influenced in positive rather than negative ways have a better chance of staying in school for as long as possible and succeeding in school.

Because many of our students come from homes where there seems to be little if any parental influence, the intervention of an adult in the lives of these students is especially important. This study is important because it will identify the needs of

students, and identify at-risk students who need to have the influence and intervention of an adult in their lives. It is important because ultimately a successful mentoring program will improve the school. Attendance will improve; students will have fewer problems requiring discipline; academic achievement will improve. Ultimately, more students will be successful in meeting the state graduation requirements of the High School Proficiency Test and the testing for the career areas (SOCAT), which seniors must pass as part of their graduation requirement.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 of this thesis will be a review of the literature. The literature will reflect information concerning risk management and at-risk students and the success and/or failure of mentoring programs in schools and other organizations. The review of the literature will be used to support the data analysis as well as to influence the further study that needed for this problem.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the manner in which this study is designed. It will describe the process used to find volunteers to mentor students as well as the identification of at-risk students, both freshmen and upperclassmen to be included in this study. It will describe the way in which the program itself was initiated by the intern and the methods of checking with volunteers and perhaps students to see if the mentor program was working. A description of the methods used to collect data concerning the program will also be included.

Chapter 4 will present the data. A comparison between two methods of mentoring students, twice a month and daily, will be shown. A comparison with the mentor program from last year will also be presented to determine if an improvement

actually occurred. A survey of the teachers involved in the mentoring program and the students being mentored will be included. Students' attendance, discipline, and academic records will also be included.

Chapter 5 will include the conclusions concerning the effectiveness of the mentoring program at CCTS Pennsauken Campus. Included will be the actual improvements made in the mentoring program. The product outcomes will be analyzed, and changes within the organization cited. Any further study needed will be addressed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Schools today are faced with risks that were unknown a few decades ago. Violence has increased along with increased costs and government regulations. Risk management, which has been a long time practice among corporate decision-makers, is now being utilized by school boards and administrators in an attempt to preserve district assets.

Risk management is a coordinated effort to protect the organization, and the key to its success is thoughtful planning along with ongoing monitoring and appropriate adjustments (Gaustad, 1994).

Since over 25 percent of high school students drop out of school before graduation (Donnelly, 1987), identification of at-risk students and the development of programs to prevent their dropping out have become of major importance in schools today. The idea of always disciplining at-risk students severely is beginning to be put aside and is being replaced by a variety of interventions that provide academic support, skill development, behavioral support, and mentoring. If at-risk students are kept in school for as long as possible, it is definitely better for them. Skills can be developed, teachers and mentors can influence students in a positive manner, and there is a better chance that the students will be prevented from becoming involved with disruptive peer groups (Walker et al, 1996).

Mentoring is not a new idea. In fact it had its beginnings over 4,000 years ago. According to the Greek legend about the Trojan War, when Odysseus, then the King of Ithaca, was going to leave his family and go off to fight a war that would last ten years, he asked his friend, Mentor, to guide his son Telemachus while Odysseus was leading the

Greek army to victory (Carr, 1995).

Today the mentor is usually defined as an older, more-experienced person who acts as a guide for someone who is younger and less-experienced. Mentors are not only restricted to school situations but also are often found on the job (Carr, 1995). Mentors, according to many experts, are essential to success in both academic and career developments. Many famous scientists and physicians have been encouraged by role models and people who cared about them and listened to them. In fact, the first winner of the first annual Harvard Medical School Excellence in Mentoring Award, Steven Burakoff, credits the professors who mentored him as important factors in his success (Mentations, 1995). Many school districts have also begun mentoring programs for beginning teachers. In most districts, a more experienced and successful teacher is paired with a beginning teacher. These teachers take the time to answer questions about school processes, routines, and procedures. They advise new teachers about issues that arise (including relationships with parents), remind them of deadlines, assist in routine matters. Most of all, these more experienced mentors provide encouragement during difficult times (DiGeronimo, 1993). Since elementary school teachers may feel isolated in their work, the experience of having a supportive relationship in the workplace was ranked as one of the strongest motivational factors in their success (Bainer & Didham, 1997). Research has determined that the mentoring process is one of the best ways to help a person to fulfill his/her potential in an organization (Jensen, 1995).

Over the years, mentoring has been used in professional development of adults in a workplace. A mentor in a work situation would be the person who takes responsibility for a new employee and guides him through the company.

In schools there is this same critical need for someone to guide the young people, particularly those who are deemed at-risk. There is a need for a lasting involvement of a positive adult figure in the life of a student. This relationship must be a long-term one in which mentors help establish or reinforce high expectations, improve self esteem, and set goals (Womble, 1994).

In our country, mentoring began in 1904 with a program called Big Brothers-Big Sisters. This program, which at one time seemed to be an old concept, now serves 100,000 children through 500 agencies (Heinlein, 1996). According to a published mentoring study in 1996, which studied Big Brothers-Big Sisters programs around the country for 18 months, after one year of mentoring, children who have mentors “were 46 percent less likely to use drugs, 27 percent less likely to drink alcohol, 52 percent less likely to skip school, 32 percent less likely to skip a class, and 33 percent less likely to engage in any violent behavior.” (Swann, 1997). Students who are mentored also maintained slightly higher grades and tended to feel less isolated and are more trusting. Although the study did not reveal any gain in the areas of self-confidence or self-worth, it is considered to be a “landmark study” because it is the “first reliable, objective research showing (mentors) have an impact.” (Heinlein, 1996).

Over the past twenty years, dozens of mentoring programs have linked young people with caring adults. A developmental psychologist at the University of California, Emmy E. Werner, has said that the presence of a mentor is a key factor in student resilience or the ability of students to succeed in the face of challenging circumstances. A growing interest in the mentoring of disadvantaged youth has been developing. Social support research has found benefits in relationships with nonprofessional sources of help

for disadvantaged youths. A study by Williams and Kornblum in 1985 found that a major difference between disadvantaged youth who became successful and those who were unsuccessful was that the successful young person had a caring mentor (Rhodes, 1994). Mentoring has led to a variety of roles for the mentor including tutor, friend, substitute parent, or just someone to talk with (Sommerfield, 1996).

Mentor programs began to gain popularity in the early 1990s after U.S. Census figures showed dropout rates among high school students nationally were 12 percent. In fact, in some urban areas the dropout rate can be as high as 50 percent (Murray, 1995) with 3600 students dropping out of high school each day, and 2700 teenage girls getting pregnant (Petersmeyer, 1989). Many young people need positive role models. Single-parent homes and two-parent working families have increased radically. Mentors are needed to fill the void of absent parents. Along with their dramatic growth, mentoring programs have become very popular because of many testimonials from both mentors and those who are mentored. Each has found benefits from the relationship (Dennis, 1993).

Among several objectives of federal government's National Education Goals is dropout prevention. Mentoring programs have been playing a part in helping to bring these dropout rates down. A study conducted by Ellen Slicker and Douglas Palmer, two psychologists from Texas A&M University, examined the success of Spring High School's (Texas) mentor program. They discovered that a mentor relationship needs most of all to be consistent but not necessarily extensive. In this particular school 86 students were mentored by volunteer school personnel. Students to be mentored had been identified as high risks for dropping out because of poor attendance, low skills, bad

grades, and behavior problems. Mentors met with students once a week and helped them through problems using a five- step strategy: Students were to think about problems, examine choices, chose for themselves, implement their choice, and examine how things worked out. Mentors monitors students on a regular basis. The study found that those who were mentored closely had a 100 percent retention rate while those who were poorly mentored dropped out of school (Murray, 1995).

The groups most targeted for mentoring are disadvantaged youths, those young people who do not have supportive relationships. These lack of supportive relationships can cause students to fail to succeed in school and to adjust poorly socially. Mentors, working in a structured program, should help adolescents compensate for the things lacking in their lives and create for them new opportunities in education, work, and social life. Mentors should be role models and counselors as well as teachers, advisers and coaches. The most critical aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship must be trust (Asher, 1988). Mentoring can be a way of promoting social change and equal education for all, as well as a method of personal empowerment. At Benjamin Tasker Middle School in Prince George's County, Maryland, concern about low student achievement led to a mentoring program that involved the school staff and the community at large. A group of 35 African-American students were initially identified by teachers as having discipline or academic problems. Each student was to have an adult to interact with. Teachers were recruited on a volunteer basis. Students who were having problems in school were given support, and as the program got underway, more students were included in this program, more teachers and other staff members were volunteering. During the second year, business people and other individuals were participating in the program. This successful

program not only provided many personal benefits but also improved this school's test scores, increased attendance, decreased suspensions, and students developed better social skills and self esteem. Three or four other schools in the district began to follow Benjamin Tasker Middle School's lead (White-Hood, 1993).

The success of mentoring programs depend on a number of factors. First, although mentoring programs are usually informal, there must be a systematic planning. A mentoring program must have a mission, purpose, and specific objectives. Also, support within the organization must exist. Both the mentor and mentee must also know that their needs are being met. It must be recognized that mentors also have needs, and if these needs are not met, the mentor will become dissatisfied and probably dropout of the program, or at the very least discourage others from participating (Carr, 1995).

Literature also indicates that although most research points to the importance and success of mentor relationships, there are still questions that need to be addressed concerning their influence. The influence of parental bonds and relationships with other adults are still in question. Most researchers agree that mentor relationships take the place of strong parental bonds, but some suggest that only young people who already have strong parental bonds are able to trust other adults. In other words, some children are resilient because they already have the skills to seek out people they can trust. Also, the idea that failed relationships (between mentor and mentee) can have the detrimental effects of hurt and disappointment need to be explored and documented. Lastly, the factors that influence mentors and the benefits mentors may get from programs should be explored. All of these need to be explored because mentoring programs are growing rapidly (Rhodes, 1994).

When implementing a mentor program, the literature suggests some guidelines to be followed:

First, the needs of the students should be identified. Second, the student should decide whether he or she wants a mentor. Students should be questioned about this as well as what type of mentor he/she feels he/she needs. Is the student prepared to spend the required time with a mentor? Does the student understand the purpose, the benefits, and the limitations of the relationship? Third, mentor candidates should be identified. Fourth, mentors should be interviewed to determine their interests, the amount of time they might be willing to spend with the program, and their compatibility with the student. Fifth, the students should understand the purpose of the relationship. Sixth, monitor the mentor relationship (Berger, 1990).

Lynn Swann, an ABC sportscaster, former wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers, and a board of director of Big Brother-Big Sisters of America reminds everyone that a mentor does not have to be rich or famous. If someone works hard towards a goal himself, he/she can teach a young person how to “recognize responsibilities and how to be a productive individual. Young people need mentors to share such wisdom. Positive and productive lives will be the result.” (Swann, 1997).

"It is important for kids to have an adult in their life," says Judy Wertz, a special assistant to Undersecretary of Education Marshall S. Smith (Sommerfield, 1996).

CHAPTER III

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The mentor program at Camden County Technical Schools began approximately ten years ago. Its main purpose was to couple at-risk students with willing teachers and other staff members who mentored one or more students throughout their stay at the school. Students who were mentored were chosen during their freshman year on the basis of their attendance and any discipline problems which they might have had in the past. Teachers and other staff members were volunteers. Since its inception, the program had approximately fourteen teacher mentors; each one mentored one or more students. Students were contacted by the mentors twice each month. Monitoring of this program was conducted by an assistant principal who simply asked for volunteers, provided the staff member with the name of a student, and then collected a folder each month. At the end of the year, a report was compiled. The report simply conveyed how many mentored students were still enrolled.

This study improved and expanded the existing mentor program. Students who were deemed at-risk previously and were being mentored continued in the program with the same mentor who had been following their progress. Additional names of students who were new to the school were obtained from the school social worker, who had been providing this list over the years. In addition, this new study included more students. Names of upperclassmen who were considered at-risk because of attendance or discipline problems were now included on the social worker's list. Students who felt they needed to have contact with a mentor volunteered for the program. Teachers were asked to

suggest names of upperclassmen whom the teacher felt could benefit from the program. The program was also expanded to include contact with students on a daily basis rather than only twice a month. Folders were provided to each mentor with the student's schedule and a basic "report" form for mentors to use when they met with students. Progress of students in the areas of attendance, academic growth and discipline was followed.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESIGN

In anticipation of beginning the mentor program promptly during this school year (during the previous year, the program began in January, and students were only mentored for half the school year), the intern met in September with the assistant principal who had been monitoring the program previously. Changes in the program were discussed. First, the inclusion of "first-time" at-risk upperclassmen was approved. Second, developing a more personal contact with each mentor was decided. Rather than just sending each teacher a memo concerning the program and volunteering, the mentor contacted each teacher personally and discussed continuing to mentor or becoming a new mentor during this school year. Third, the intern met with the school social worker to obtain a list of students considered to be at-risk because of attendance or discipline problems. The social worker was updated on the new idea of inclusion of upperclassmen on the mentoring list. As each teacher was contacted, the intern asked each one if he/she knew of any upperclassmen who might need a mentor. Teachers were also told that they could choose the student they would mentor based on personal rapport with the student. Students were also involved in the program in a new way. An announcement ran in the student bulletin for approximately three weeks asking students who thought they might

benefit from having a mentor to contact the intern who would in turn pair the student with a teacher. The teacher might be one the student felt he or she would feel comfortable with. The intern then contacted the prospective mentor and partnered the student and mentor. A list of students and mentors was compiled. Each teacher was given a folder, as had been done in previous years, containing the student's schedule, any other pertinent information concerning the student, and a "blanket" instruction to contact the student at least two times each month. A short report of the meeting was to be included in each folder, and folders were to be forwarded to the intern during the first week of each month for review. A total of twenty-three teachers and other faculty members volunteered to mentor twenty-eight students. This was an improvement over previous years when fourteen mentors followed the progress of approximately sixteen students. Two of the previous fourteen teachers who were mentors decided not to continue with the program; essentially the new program involved eleven new teachers, and seven upperclassmen were also included. Of the seven upperclassmen, three were recommended by teachers who then became their mentors. One student, a freshman, was paired with a teacher at her own request. She was paired with her shop teacher, who was able to be in contact with her on a daily basis. The program was underway by the first week in October.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA COLLECTION

Of the twenty-eight students involved in the program, thirteen were in contact with their mentors on a daily basis. Mentors monitored students progress in classes, their attendance, and any discipline problems. Each mentor reviewed report cards with students at the end of each marking period. The intern followed up on each faculty member by personal contact with each mentor on a regular basis. This proved important

in several cases where mentors and students were developing a rapport. Without a needed rapport, the mentor was not able to monitor the student's progress. The intern also requested that each teacher write a brief report of meetings with the student being mentored, and reports were submitted at the beginning of each month. At that time, the intern read each report and began to keep a written record of students' successes and failures as well as the rapport between the teacher and the student. Grades for each student were collected, and for the upperclassmen in the program, a comparison was made between the grades from last year and this year's grades to see if there had been any improvement. Discipline records and attendance records for each student were also accumulated. A comparison between the progress of students seen on a daily basis and those seen twice a month was made to determine if a difference in attendance, academics, and discipline could be found. Finally, students and mentors were given a survey to ascertain whether those directly involved in the program felt it was successfully serving its purpose. A report was filed at the end of the year outlining the program's progress and the difference between the mentoring techniques (daily and twice monthly) and the progress of each student involved in the program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

At the beginning of each month data concerning meetings between mentors and students was collected and studied. The basic analysis was comparison of the students' progress either from one school year to the next, or in the case of the ninth grade students involved in the program, from one marking period to the next. Data was used to determine the success of students who had been mentored from freshman to senior years. Did mentoring have a direct effect on the success of students in any areas? If there had

been improvement in attendance because a mentor has discussed and kept track of the student's attendance or tardiness, this was significant. If a student had been having academic problems or problems with teachers, was there an improvement through contact with a mentor? Discipline data acquired from the files in the assistant principal's office as well as reports from mentors determined if there had been a significant reduction in incidents which required either internal or external suspension of students being mentored. Did the influence of a mentor assist the student in relations with other students or teachers with whom he/she seemed to be having significant problems which led to disciplinary action? Additional analysis of data came from personal contact with mentors who were always able to determine if students were actually making progress while they are being mentored. Analysis of the data was also used to determine if a student continued to be at-risk or if he/she was able to function without the aid of his/her mentor and still continue to be successful in school. Surveys taken of students and teachers involved in the program were analyzed for suggestions for improvement of the program during the next school year.

EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The impact of a mentoring program was determined by the success of the students who were involved in the program. If the student, who was at-risk for success in school, improved in any of the areas in which the mentor had been working, academically, in his/her attendance, or in the number of times he/she was disciplined, the program had an effect on the student as well as on the school. Another impact of a successful mentoring program was that students had more personal, successful contact with a teacher. In the case of some of our at-risk students, there had been little contact with someone who could

serve as a role model or with anyone who was willing to encourage the student to stay in school and to succeed in school. In addition, personal contact between the intern and the mentors strengthened the program. Mentors were able to ask questions about the program, about what they were trying to determine about the student, and to make suggestions about improving the program and ways to make it more effective for students.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Twenty-three staff members at this school were paired to mentor twenty-eight students who were considered “at-risk.” Some students had been involved in the mentor program since freshman year. In three cases, students were seniors this year. Three juniors were originally involved in this program and had been mentored since freshman year, but one chose to leave the school and return to his sending district and one was classified and sent to the special needs division. One junior remains in the mentor program. Fourteen sophomores were involved in this year’s program; seven were involved in the program since freshman year, and the remaining seven were new to the program this year. Of the seven who were mentored last year, one was classified and sent to the special needs division, and two left the school district. Six of the seven new sophomores remained in the mentor program this year; one was asked to leave the school because of a knife incident. Moreover, this student was introduced into the program this year, but the mentor was not actually ever able to make contact with her because she was in internal suspension and then on a long-term external suspension before being asked to leave the district. The mentor was paired with another student. The remaining students were freshmen, new to the program this year.

Four of the twenty-eight students were seen on a daily basis by their mentors and a report was written and submitted at the beginning of each month. The other students were seen either weekly or twice each month. On a daily basis, mentors were able to speak frankly with the students concerning personal affairs, attendance, general

behavior, grades, lates to school, and internal/external suspensions. Mentors who saw students on a less frequent basis were more inclined to just discuss grades with the students unless a student had a specific problem. Most of the mentors did contact another teacher if a student was having a specific problem.

Three seniors have been mentored on a regular basis by the same mentor since freshman year. One of these seniors, a girl, entered the district as a freshman who was also a teenage mother. She had been living in foster homes and had many problems. During her first years at the school, she spent many days in internal suspension and externally suspended. By senior year, this student has matured and really progressed. She is passing all of her subjects, has been accepted to college, and has spent only three days in internal suspension and has not been suspended externally. In previous years, she had spent an average of five days externally suspended each year. Her attendance also is good; she has been absent only four days and late only twice. This is also an improvement over previous years when she was absent six or more days. Her attitude has improved greatly also, and this is one reason she is able to remain in school without being suspended. The other senior is working exceptionally hard this year; he has brought up all his grades except English, which he seems to fail each year. He has not passed the eleventh grade HSPT but has one more chance to do so. He is also attending night school to make up credits he needs for graduation. His mentor has also been very busy working with him on a daily basis in both day and night school trying to encourage him concerning the HSPT and graduation. This student has remained in school and is working very hard towards graduation against a great many odds; his mentor has been instrumental in keeping him in school. The third senior has had no real problems with

discipline or with grades. She does, however, have a problem with tardiness to school, which the mentor tries to discuss with her each time they meet. This is the first year that this has improved.

The one eleventh grader in this program has definitely improved his behavior. During his sophomore year, he was suspended externally for eighteen days, and in addition, he spent five days in internal suspension. This year he has not spent any time in internal suspension nor has he been suspended externally.

Many of the tenth graders in the program are being mentored for the first time this year. These students were recommended either by a faculty member who saw a need or by the school social worker. Of the sophomores who were in the mentor program since freshman year, all but one are passing all of their subjects. The one failure has been in the shop area for one student. Only one of these sophomores has spent any time in internal or external suspension, and she is being mentored by the school psychologist because she has a great many problems. She has improved, however, over last year. Last year she was externally suspended for five days, and this year she has spent three days in internal suspension. One of the new sophomores who was recommended for the mentor program is repeating sophomore year. He has attendance problems, problems in his shop area and with some academic classes and has spent many days in internal suspension and externally suspended. He did pass the eleventh grade HSPT on the first try. The teacher who volunteered to mentor this student has not done anything. In spite of many requests for the written evaluation, one has never been turned in. All indications are that this mentor has not met with this student at all. Therefore, no improvement can be noted. Since this program is voluntary, not much can be done about the situation. Another tenth

grader who has been involved in this program has felt that her mentor has done more for her than any other teacher or adult ever has. She felt so strongly about this that the mentor was made the subject of an English essay. She has had no suspensions and is passing all of her subjects.

One sophomore who is new to the program this year does not feel he needs a mentor. He is passing all of his subjects and has perfect attendance, and this year he has not been suspended at all either externally or internally. Last year without a mentor he spent six days suspended externally and one day in internal suspension. He was recommended for the program by an academic teacher who felt he could benefit from the guidance of a male adult. Although the mentor has met with the student regularly, the student feels it is of no benefit to him.

Another tenth grader is being mentored by his basketball coach, who recommended him for this program. This student has improved all of his grades with the exception of English. The mentor has been meeting with the English teacher to try to give the mentee additional help. This student's behavior has improved over last year. This is evidenced by an improvement in the amount of time he has spent externally suspended -- six days last year and three days this year. He was also internally suspended four days last year without a mentor and only one day this year.

One tenth grader's greatest improvement was in tardiness to school. This student came late to school everyday until he became involved in the mentor program. He then began to come to school on time, thereby avoiding internal suspension for every five lates to school, because the mentor talked to him every day about getting to school on time. He also finally passed all of his subjects during the second marking period.

One mentor of a freshman boy has been unable to meet with his mentee because this student spends most of his time in internal suspension or externally suspended. He also has been absent sixteen days this year and is failing all his subjects except math. Naturally, the mentor cannot see any improvement in this student because he has basically be unable to work with him.

Comparing grades between two marking periods for the freshmen involved in the mentor program, demonstrated a basic improvement in most cases. Freshmen this year were admitted under a new policy and are considered less “at-risk” than previous students, but some still have academic problems. Two of the freshmen are failing all of their subjects. One is the student who has been constantly suspended or absent; the second is a girl who is a “late entry” to the mentor program. She was paired with the mentor during the second marking period, and the two have been working to bring her grades up to passing. One freshman mentee has a medical problem (epilepsy) which the mentor has had to deal with several times this year in her shop area. The mentor has been very successful in making this student feel at ease in a classrooms situation.

A survey was taken of both the mentors and the mentees. The perspectives of each were essentially quite different. Mentors reported discussions that included personal affairs, attendance, general behavior, grades, lates, and suspensions. Students, on the other hand, found that mentors mostly discussed grades. With the exception of the one student who did not want to be part of the mentor program, all the students surveyed thought the mentor program should be continued because it was beneficial to them. Of the twenty-three mentors surveyed, nineteen saw improvements in the students whom they mentored. Three saw no improvement, and one was unsure because the student was

not in his/her class. Only two students surveyed felt that meeting and speaking with a mentor did not help them. As of this date, of the twenty-eight students in this mentor program, two were classified special needs; three were transferred to other schools or dropped out of school; one student was not seen by the mentor at all; one had a conflict with the mentor and was dropped from the program (the parent felt he did not need a mentor); twenty-one remain in the program.

INTERPRETATION OF THE INFORMATION

Analysis of mentor report files, student grades, attendance, and discipline record have determined an overall improvement in all areas for most of the “at-risk” students in this mentoring program. Students who have regular contact with a mentor pass their academic subjects more regularly, attend school on a regular basis, are tardy less often, and are subject to discipline measures less frequently. Because of the nature of this mentor program, meeting with a student on a daily basis rather than weekly or twice a month did not make any appreciable difference in student improvement. Students were able to have someone to guide them more frequently, but it did not seem to make a great difference in the overall results for students.

Three students who were involved in the program essentially did not receive any mentoring. One, as mentioned previously in this text, was asked to leave the district shortly after she was recommended for the program, and the mentor never had any chance to contact the student; the second has had so many absences and disciplinary measures that again, the mentor did not have a chance to see the student. The third student, the one whom the mentor just did not contact, did not show any improvement. Essentially, he is a student who was not mentored and is not succeeding. The conclusion, therefore, is that

the mentoring program is of benefit to students who are “at-risk” because improvement is shown in all areas of school life. Students who are “at-risk” and were not mentored did not seem to be able to function successfully in a school setting.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Just as the literature has proven, at-risk students do benefit from personal contact with an adult during the school year. The mentor program at Camden County Technical Schools showed that at-risk students -- students with discipline, academic, and attendance problems who had this contact could and did show improvement. Of the twenty-eight original students in this year's mentor program, twenty-three students remained in our school. Of the five who were no longer in our school, two were classified as special needs students and transferred to our special needs division, which is located at our other campus (thus preventing the mentor from continuing with the student) and three were either asked to leave the district and return to their sending districts because of conflicts that are not tolerated by our district or transferred to other districts. Students who remained in contact with a mentor showed improvement in the number of times they are suspended either internally or externally, which determined that they have fewer discipline problems overall. The mentors' contacts with other teachers concerning the mentee also assisted the student in staying on track and improving not only in the area of discipline but also in academics. The attendance rate and the number of times students were tardy improved, a direct result of the encouragement of mentors for students to be in school and to be on time for school.

This mentor program, however, was not given the recognition it deserved in this school district. It seemed that the program exists; the teachers and students were working hard to achieve improvement, but there was no real recognition of the program or its

results. The staff members who were mentors received a thank you letter at the beginning of the next year when volunteers were needed for the program, but no recognition was given to them during the school year.

Mentor folders were read once a month by the intern and, when appropriate, comments were made to each mentor. These comments were in the form of either an accolade for a job well done or suggestions when they were solicited. Because this was a volunteer program for staff members, there was not any close supervision over the years.

Concerning the setup and implementation of this program, some conclusions also were evident. The program would be even more successful if teachers in shop or career areas were to mentor students in their particular area. This conclusion was obvious in several ways. First, mentoring a student in his/her shop area would be beneficial to both the shop teacher and the student because the teacher would have a greater opportunity to get to know a student who is already in his shop area since the student is in shop for four class periods each day. Shop or career area teachers also do not have any preparation time in the school day, so if they were mentoring a student outside of their career area it was more difficult to allot time to meet with the student and to get to know him/her.

The mentor program afforded the intern many opportunities for leadership development. It was through this program that the intern was able to establish good communication with many staff members who were involved in the program. The intern also was able to increase the number of staff members who volunteered to mentor students this year and to include upperclass students who were previously not mentored since only freshmen were permitted to be mentored at the outset. The mentor program also helped the intern develop organizational skills because each staff member had to be

monitored during the program. The folders had to be collected on a regular basis, and the intern had to tactfully remind people who were forgetful. The intern also had the opportunity to share ideas with staff members who were involved in this program thereby learning to listen actively and respond appropriately. The intern also developed skills necessary to evaluate student needs and to adjust the situation when necessary. An ability to effectively evaluate the program was also developed.

IMPLICATIONS

Since the study did prove that at-risk students who were mentored were more successful in school and tend to remain in school, the main implication was that this program should continue each year. In order for it to continue to be successful, however, several changes should be made. First of all, the program should receive recognition for its success by perhaps rewarding the students who have improved and recognizing the work that the staff member has done as a mentor. More consideration should be given to mentors' schedules when students and mentors are paired. Another method of recognition for this program might be to have an initial gathering of mentors and mentees before the program begins each year. A simple pizza or ice cream party so each could have an opportunity to get to know one another could make the difference in the success of the meetings with mentors and mentees. This would show everyone that this program means something to the district and that it is worthwhile to participate.

A career or shop area teacher should be carefully paired with a student who is in his/her career area if for no other reason than to make the meetings more convenient for both the staff member and the mentee. Students in shop areas would more likely become closer to a shop area teacher than with an academic teacher because of accessibility.

Other staff members must be willing to donate some of their preparation time as well as time before and after school if necessary to spend time with the student whom they are mentoring. A brief meeting in the hallway between classes is not sufficient.

The organization changed because of this study because the mentees improved attendance thus helping the school attendance percentages meet the state goals. The students involved in the mentoring program were suspended less frequently; those mentored more than one year showed significant improvement. Mentored students also showed improvement in academic areas because their mentors were willing to spend time discussing grades, helping students, and even meeting with teachers to help these students.

By having the opportunity to actually run this mentor program this year, the intern improved communication and listening skills and the ability to work well with other staff members. The intern also learned the importance of a mentor program and was able to determine first hand that “It is important for kids to have an adult in their life,” as Judy Wertz, special assistant to Undersecretary of Education Marshall S. Smith has said (Somerfield, 1996).

FURTHER STUDY

Several aspects of this program need further study. First of all, the comparison between students who are mentored daily or weekly and those mentored only twice a month needs to be made more fully. This will require volunteer staff members to choose a specific method of mentoring and for closer monitoring of the two methods of mentoring. Second, as the freshmen are mentored through junior year, a study of whether mentoring contributes to their passing all parts of the Grade 11 HSPT should be done.

This will confirm improvement in academic areas. Third, the mentor program itself needs to be made more specific. More specific guidelines for what a mentor is to seek to accomplish should be set down in writing. A comparison might also be made to see if students who are mentored in their shop areas or areas where they are actually a class taught by a mentor improve at a greater rate because of the more consistent contact with the mentor than those who are mentored by other staff members who have contact only as a mentor.

Continued study of various ways to improve this mentor program will keep the program healthy and should be considered.

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APPENDIX A:
SURVEY: TEACHERS

APPENDIX A

SURVEY: TEACHERS

TO: All Mentors
FROM: F. MacDonough
Date: January 30, 1998

Your participation in the mentor program at our school has been invaluable this year. This program, as you may or may not know, has been one of my projects as an intern in school administration. I would appreciate your input concerning the mentor program. Please complete the following short survey and return it to my mailbox by Friday, February 6, 1998. It is not necessary for you to put your name on the survey, and all responses will be held in the strictest of confidence. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Circle the appropriate answer/answers

1. How many years have you mentored this student?
A. One B. Two C. Three D. Four
2. How often did you meet with the student?
A. Daily B. Weekly C. Twice a month D. Once a month
3. Do you find handing in a monthly write-up to be helpful in keeping up with your student?
A. Yes B. No
4. During meetings with students, which of the following did you accomplish or try to accomplish?
A. Counseling a student about personal affairs B. Discussing grades
C. Discussing attendance D. Discussing lates to school
E. Discussing general behavior F. Internal suspensions
G. External Suspension H. Other _____
5. Did you have the opportunity to speak with other teachers concerning the student you were mentoring?
A. Yes B. No
6. If so, did speaking with the teacher improve whatever problem you discussed?
A. Yes B. No
7. Did you observe an improvement in the student you mentored?
A. Yes B. No

8. What is the status of your student at this time?

A. Still in School

B. Left school

C. Transferred to GTC

D. Moved or transferred to another district

E. Other _____

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the mentor program at our school?

APPENDIX B
STUDENT SURVEY

APPENDIX B

SURVEY: STUDENTS

You have been participating in our mentor program this year (and perhaps for several years) in our school. I would appreciate your comments concerning the mentor program. Please complete the following short survey and return it to Mrs. MacDonough in Room R7 by Friday, February 6, 1998. It is not necessary for you to put your name on the survey and all responses will be held in the strictest of confidence. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Circle the appropriate answer/answers

1. How many years have you had a teacher as a mentor in our school?
A. One B. Two C. Three D. Four
2. How often did you meet with the mentor?
A. Daily B. Weekly C. Twice a month D. Once a month
3. Do you find meeting and talking with your mentor helpful to you?
A. Yes B. No
4. During these meetings, which of the following did you and your mentor discuss?
A. personal affairs B. grade
C. attendance D. lates to school
E. general behavior F. internal suspension
G. external suspensions
5. Did your mentor have an opportunity to talk to any of your other teachers about your class work or other problems?
A. Yes B. No C. Don't know
6. If so, did the mentor's speaking with the teacher improve whatever problem you were having?
A. Yes B. No C. Don't know
7. Do you think you were helped by having a mentor to talk with?
A. Yes B. No C. Don't know
8. What suggestions do you have for improving the mentor program at our school?

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Name: | Fredrica MacDonough |
| Date and Place of Birth: | November 14, 1943 Jersey City, New Jersey |
| High School: | Orleans American High School Orleans, France |
| Undergraduate Degree: | Bachelor of Arts |
| Major: | Secondary School English |
| Institution: | Jersey City State College |
| Graduate Degree: | Master of Arts |
| Major: | School Administration |
| Institution: | Rowan University |
| Present Occupation: | Secondary School Teacher |
| Place of Employment: | Camden County Technical Schools |
| Position: | Teacher of English |