

***Report on Follow-up Interviews with Former
Chosen to Achieve Program Participants***

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Executive Summary

The Chosen to Achieve mentoring program provides 7th and 8th grade African American students in the St. Paul school district with adult African American mentors. The mentors meet with the students at least twice a month in the school, during school hours in order to help them achieve academically, socially, and personally. The program has served over one hundred students and involved over one hundred volunteer mentors since its inception. What happens to students after the program? What are former participants' perceptions of the program and the impact of the program on their success?

Metropolitan State University faculty and students conducted brief (15-30 minute) interviews with 48 former program participants who were high school students in the St. Paul school district. The former mentees were asked what they thought about the Chosen to Achieve program, how it helped them (or didn't) do well academically, socially, and personally, how important to them was it that their mentor was African American, and ways they thought the program could be improved.

In general, the youth spoke positively about their experience with Chosen to Achieve. They identified the help and support they received from their mentors as important to their success at school and the most valued and helpful things about the program. *"My experience was great. It was encouraging. My mentor focused on me, my classes, how I was doing. Overall, my experience was uplifting to know there are beings in the world who care about African American females & don't go on stereotypes."* The various activities (such as the banquet) and field trips sponsored by the program were highly memorable and valued as well. The majority (96%) indicated that they plan to graduate from high school, most (79%) plan on going to college or trade school. The majority felt that their mentor was an important influence on these plans.

The majority felt that having an African American mentor was important to them. It was a positive experience because the interactions felt comfortable. Some students reported a feeling of connectedness or understanding with their mentor(s) on the basis of shared cultural experiences

such as growing up, religion, the role of drugs, and stereotypes. A majority of students reported a positive change in their feelings about the African American community because of the program. However, a small number of students indicated that they rather have a mentor from a different culture than to have no mentor at all.

Students also indicated that the program has helped them to be better people by improving their attitude toward others and about school, their ability to communicate and relate with others, their outlook on life, confidence, motivation, and self-esteem. *“It helped me look at school and learning in a different perspective. It made me look at how keeping my grades up will help me when I get older.”* *“Before Chosen to Achieve I felt I was not good enough to go to college because my grades were not very good, but since the program I feel my grades are good enough and that I can go to college and succeed.”*

The former Chosen to Achieve participants felt that the program was so good that it didn’t need any changes. However, they did note that they would like to have had more contact with their mentors and more opportunities to get together with other program participants. Further, they recommended that the program be continued into the 9th and 10th grade so that they could continue to benefit from the relationship they developed with their mentor.

Recommendations that result from the interviews with students include:

- *Expanding the program into 9th and 10th grade in order to better facilitate positive adaptation to the high school environment and curriculum,*
- *Continuing to improve efforts at recruitment, support, guidance and follow-up with mentors in order to reduce experiences of non-mentoring or ineffective mentoring (inconsistent meetings, no shows, lack of contact, etc.),*
- *Continuing to offer opportunities for mentees to gather and meet with each other, both with-in and across the various schools,*
- *Identifying ways in which students, families and mentors can continue to celebrate together the success of the mentees and their involvement with the program (e.g., banquet), more often than once a year,*
- *Making African American culture and community a more transparent element within the program, and*
- *Providing opportunities for parents to meet and support one another.*

Introduction

McLearn, Colasanto, Schoen, & Shapiro (1999) reported that approximately 5 million American youth were involved in school and community-based volunteer mentoring programs. The U.S. Department of Justice and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimate that between 5 and 15 million youth could potentially benefit from implementation of a mentoring program (Grossman & Garry, 1997).

Because the main component of a mentoring program is to foster the development of a close alliance between an invested adult and an adolescent, mentors serve as positive role models of care and support. One role of the mentor is to challenge negative views of self or relationships that the adolescent may have, and demonstrate to the youth that it is possible to have a positive, nurturing relationship with an adult with whom they can identify (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

This is a report of an evaluation study conducted for the St. Paul Public Schools by Metropolitan State University faculty and students for the purpose of obtaining follow-up information from former participants of the school district's Chosen to Achieve middle school African American mentoring program. The study was done as part of an overall program evaluation in fulfillment of requirements for its U.S. Department of Education grant. The aim of the evaluation was to examine students' perceptions of the program's impact on their personal, academic, and social life as well as their suggestions for program improvement.

Method

Two Metropolitan State University faculty members, from the Psychology and the Human Services departments, collaborated with the Director of the mentoring program to design the study, which consisted of a survey and semi-structured interview (see Appendix for survey and interview script). The interviews were structured so that all questions were asked in the same order and manner by each interviewer. All interviewers (psychology undergraduate and graduate students) were required to complete an on-line training program in the protection of human subjects and attend a 4-hour qualitative interviewer training session. Faculty investigators supervised the interviewers on-site.

Arrangements were made to conduct interviews at seven St. Paul area high schools where most of the former program participants attended school. Letters were mailed to parents/guardians of former mentees describing the study and requesting that they contact the program if they did not want their child to be interviewed. From the group of former mentees who were enrolled in St. Paul school district high schools (N=76), 48 (63%) students (Table 1), between the ages of 14-17 (17% were 14 years, 46% were 15 years, 29% were 16 years, and 6% were 17 years old), were surveyed and interviewed in March 2007. The majority of the students interviewed were in the 9th grade (50%), while 35% were in 10th grade and 13% were in 11th grade.

Table 1: Participant response rate by school.

High School	Mentored Students	Interviewed	Response Rate
Arlington	8	4	50%
Humboldt	8	4	50%
Highland	8	6	75%
Johnson	18	14	78%
Harding	13	9	69%
Central ¹	12	4	33%
Como	9	7	78%
Overall	76	48	63%

On the day of the survey/interview, students were released from class for 30-40 minutes to complete this process, which included talking with the students regarding the purpose and content of the interview, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Individual interviews were conducted in private spaces in large, open school areas (i.e. empty cafeteria or empty auditorium) or in private offices. The interviewers followed the interview script and read each of the questions to the students. They then wrote down verbatim (whenever possible) what the student said. After the interview was concluded, the interviewers reviewed and sometimes rewrote (better penmanship) the answers.

All answers to the interviews were transcribed into a word processing document, and answers to the survey were transferred into an excel spreadsheet for analysis. Graduate and undergraduate students supervised by Dr. Hazel identified response patterns and the magnitude or the frequency of specific responses. The results were then organized by categories and themes. The following provides a summary of the results.

Results

Answers to each of the questions were analyzed to determine response patterns. The frequency charts below depict percentages of specific responses based on the total number of students responding to the question.

Experience with Chosen to Achieve and their Mentor

Of the students who participated in the evaluation, 33% reported that they were mentored (met with a mentor more than once) in the 7th grade, and 77% indicated that they were mentored in the 8th grade. Nine (19%) students indicated that they were mentored in both 7th and 8th grade. When asked how many different mentors they had when they were with the program, 3 students (6%)

¹ Interview schedules at Central high school coincided with the State high school Basketball tournament in which Central was a finalist. When we arrived, faculty and staff were loading 1000 students onto busses to attend the game and support their team. Only a handful of Chosen to Achieve mentees were thus available for interviewing.

indicated that they never received a mentor, 22 students (46%) said they had one mentor, 21 students (44%) indicated two mentors, and 1 student said they had three mentors.

In the interview, participants were asked to describe the things they did or talked about with their mentor. The bulk of their mentoring focused on conversations about school and academics, mixed in with activities that were focused on helping the student with their academics (Table 2). In addition, participants described the program or their mentor using words such as helpful, good, great, excellent, all right, dedicated, fun, and/or encouraged. Only three students expressed dissatisfaction with the program. One student stated they didn't have a mentor until the last two weeks of the 8th grade, while another stated they only saw their mentor once.

When I began I had two mentors who gave me stuff and helped me with my homework. We talked about what or if I was going to go to college, what I was going to do with my life after high school.

It was an excellent experience, very fun. It was good to have the mentor around, they could relate to what you're going through. We talked about sports, if I wanted to get my own vehicle. If I wanted to be an entrepreneur.

It was good. There were meetings where everyone got together, family was invited and it helped with classes.

Talked about a lot of schoolwork, about my grades & how to keep it. I learned about extra credit, didn't know about it. I do it now, it helps a lot. I never would do it before. Talked about basketball, we both liked it. One time all the mentors & mentees got together and played. Rewarded for good grades – got 2 CDs and 3 gift cards, like for movies and Target.

Mentor bought books and read with me. My mentor helped me with my homework. She bought lunch.

My experience was great. It was encouraging. My mentor focused on me, my classes, how I was doing. Overall, my experience was uplifting to know there are beings in the world who care about African American females & don't go on stereotypes.

Table 2: What were the things you and your mentor did or talked about?

Topics of conversation	Percent of Students
School	43%
Grades	35%
Student's future	25%
Student's family life	14%
Sports	14%
College	14%
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Activities with mentor(s)	
Helped with their homework	25%
Fieldtrips or outings	18%
Taken out to eat	18%

In response to what they like the most about the program, the majority expressed that they had an enjoyable experience(s) with the program and with their mentor(s) (Table 3). The Banquet and field trips were very popular:

What I enjoyed about the program was the banquet. They would bring all of the schools together and we could just chill & stuff.

I liked it because we went on field trips and stuff, my mentor was really cool.

I enjoyed meeting together as a group and talking, and the dinner at the end of the program because I participated & sang in it.

I enjoyed everything. Miss Anna Young was fun and had fun activities, like, we played basketball with people from all the different schools. It was really fun.

I liked the banquet that brought all the schools together and the field trips.

I liked the trips and going to see speakers.

It was fun when we went on field trips. I didn't see my mentors very often, only once or twice in 7th and 8th grade. On field trips, we went to Mankato State University, saw Kwami. We talked about how my life was, how to improve my grades, did I like the program and what I like to do in my spare time.

as well as their mentoring experience:

I enjoyed the company. I enjoyed being able to talk to someone who had been through what I went through.

People took time to help students with work and other things. I got really close with my mentors so we were more like friends than mentor and mentee.

I enjoyed that someone was there to help me with my missing work and sometimes my homework.

I liked how she talked to me. She gave me ideas and sometimes suggested things that were nice.

My first year, my mentor was a college student, we got really close. We still talk today, we had a lot in common, a lot of the same interests. We both ran track. She took me in like a sister. My other mentor was an older African American lady. I have a church background and so did she so we had a lot in common.

It was a real fun program because I knew my friends were in the program so I know everyone and my mentors were real helpful. We talked about when I get out of school what I was thinking about doing after. Helped me on math homework, and talked about general questions.

Table 3: What did you most enjoy about the program or your experience with your mentor(s)?

Enjoyed most	Percent of Students
Banquet	10%
Activities and Field Trips	20%
Positive response of mentor(s)	37%
Mentor(s) tutoring.	29%
Program overall	75%

When asked how important their relationship with their mentor was to them, the majority (60%) indicated that their relationship was important to very important to them (Table 4).

Table 4: How important has your relationship with your mentor been to you?

How important?	Percent of Students
Not important	8%
Slightly important	29%
Important	31%
Very important	29%

Students identified help with their academics and the support they received from their mentor as the most helpful things about the program (Table 5). Many of them indicated that they benefited by receiving help with their schoolwork and by working with their mentors. Many students were able to increase their interest in school. Approximately one third of the students indicated that knowing someone cared about them and was available to offer them guidance was the most helpful aspect of the program. Goal setting and guidance with regards to future options was also reported to be helpful. A small percentage of students felt that the program was not helpful to them.

Just talking to me and influencing me to do the right things, and inspiring me to do better in school.

I am reading better- I am getting into reading while before I couldn't get into reading, even books I liked.

For instance, like if you were down & had bad grades, they'd motivate you to get good grades. You need to go in there and do it & stop messing up. After that we'd feel determined, it was because of what they did or what they said.

He made homework seem fun even though it was boring, he made it fun.

Deciding what I wanted to do as a career when I get out of high school.

Made me realize how important it is to get good grades & stay in school, and you can talk to people who need help, if do good you can get prizes.

The mentor helped me change the way I was doing things, and decisions I was making.

Table 5: What about the program or your experience with the program helped you the most?

Helped the most	Percent of Students
Help with homework, and/ or an improved interest in academic subjects	42%
Receiving advice, and/ or knowing someone cared about them.	31%
Help setting goals, and exploring future options (colleges, future career choices)	15%
Program was not helpful	8%
Don't know	6%

African American Mentoring Experience

Since the program was focused specifically on African American mentors for African American students, three questions explored participants’ perceptions and opinions about this aspect of the program. In the survey, the majority (67%) indicated that having an African American mentor was important to very important to them (Table 6).

Table 6: How important is it to you that your mentors were African American?

How important?	Percent of Students
Not important	21%
Slightly important	11%
Important	44%
Very important	23%

In the interviews, many students felt that having an African American mentor was a positive experience because the interactions felt comfortable or normal to them (Table 7). Some students reported a feeling of connectedness or understanding with their mentor(s) on the basis of shared cultural experiences such as growing up, religion, the role of drugs, and stereotypes. A few students said that their mentor was like a family member to them. Many students (21%) also said that the ethnicity of the mentor didn't matter to them. One student said that it was important just to have someone there to help them.

It was nice. One of my mentors was African American and the one I clicked with better wasn't. It isn't as much about race as it is about interests. But you do connect more with people who look like you, but it didn't matter too much.

I really don't know because they were my first mentors.

It made me feel comfortable and made me feel like he understood where I was coming from with the problems I was having.

[My mentor] was really good, she was a perfect example of a Black person who messed up early in life, but made it in the end. A Black person who did better in life is a better encouragement to me, but I don't care what race the mentor is.

It was good, I got to see how they got through what they went through and how they succeeded.

It really didn't matter, as long as someone was there helping me.

Table 7: What was it like for you having (an) African American mentor(s)?

What was it like...?	Percent of Students
Ok, alright, or good	25%
Stressed importance of feelings of understanding/connection with mentor	23%
Ethnicity didn't matter	21%
Discussed cultural aspects	13%
Don't know/no answer	8%
Mentors took on missing family roles (mom, dad, sister)	6%
Was comfortable	4%

We also asked in what way their experience impacted their thoughts regarding the African American community (Table 8). The majority of students reported positive changes in feelings or thoughts about the African American community as a result of their experience with Chosen to Achieve. Some students reported a sense of belonging to an ethnicity that has the ability to overcome unique obstacles, such as discrimination and negative stereotypes, on the path to success in life. Students also discussed finding value in learning about cultural aspects in a positive context. A few students commented on feeling reassured that adults are interested in playing an active role in guiding young African American students. One student felt that every ethnicity should be included in the program. Another reported an increase in self-esteem and ethnic identity as a result of participation in the program.

I think chosen to achieve really helped us come back, cause people thought African-Americans were stupid. People used to think Black people were stupid ant not going to college. I'm going to college. And that's proving something to the people, that everybody is not stupid.

Not just the African American community, but all communities think we don't have to work hard to achieve, but it's not true. We should all try to do better in our communities because we all have flaws.

Considering that I don't really remember that it was focused on African Americans, I don't really remember.

It made me feel better. We were doing more activities together, made me think we should do better at school, not all the bad things.

My mentor was, he made me feel good. I liked to see African-Americans make it. It doesn't always happen that way, be drug dealing. I'm trying to go another route.

Yeah, don't talk about all the other stuff I used to, like making jokes about African Americans, Black people.

Most people try to put African Americans down, saying they won't be successful, but this program showed me that African Americans are successful, and it has encouraged me.

Shows that I can cope with other people in my race and that way I can learn about my history from older people then and that stuff we went to the past can help me be a better person, they didn't have the opportunities I have.

I think it's a very important community and we should keep it alive.

Table 8: In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you feel or think about the African American community?

Affected how think/feel?	Percent of Students
No change	29%
Positive change	50%
Can overcome obstacles, succeed, do better	23%
Discussed aspects of culture/community	15%
Discussed willingness to help youth	10%
Improved feelings of self-esteem	2%
Don't know, didn't focus on	19%

Impact on Academics

When asked: “How are you doing in your classes?” most (81%) participants reported that they were currently doing ok or better (Table 9).

Table 9: How are you doing in your classes?

How doing in classes?	Percent of Students
Not very good	17%
OK	40%
Pretty good	35%
Really good	6%

In the interview, students noted that their participation in Chosen to Achieve had helped them become a better student (Table 10). A large group of students reported getting help with studying and homework and an improvement in grades. Some students stressed discussions about high school grades, plans for college, and career aspirations as motivating factors in their school achievement. Other students reported an improvement in attention in class and that they had fewer behavior problems at school. A few students reported no change in school achievement.

To show me that life is full of many opportunities. I should pay attention to what’s going on around me and I could learn something and having a good high school/ college education can help me to be a better person in the future.

It helped my see good things, being serious about school. I’m talkative and social and I had to cut that out. It’s time to think about my future. I’m a minority and it’s harder for me so I’ve got to be at the top pf my game pr they’ll look down on me.

Because I pay more attention in class, and I ask questions too.

Not really, she made me think about being a better student but didn’t make me a better student.

I think I became a better student because we would sit down and talk about life. If I want to be someone, she'll help me with my expectations to help me become what I want to become.

Table 10: In what ways, if any, do you think your experience with Chosen To Achieve helped you become a better student?

How helped to be better student?	Percent of Students
Help with homework, improvement in grades	40%
Discussion about/preparation for future (education, career)	25%
Pay attention in class more/more focused	13%
Taught to control anger/fighting, "think before you speak"	8%
Didn't help	8%
Was on time	2%
Got in less trouble	2%

Participation in Support Programs

Participants were asked if they have participated in a number of programs while they have been in high school (Table 11). A majority of the students have been involved in summer school, and many receive help after school or on weekends with homework. About a third of the participants have been involved in college preparation programs. Few have been involved in any other mentoring programs.

Table 11: Have you participated in any of the following kinds of programs while you have been in high school?

Type of program	Percent of Students
Tutoring/homework help after school or on weekends	44%
Summer school	58%
College preparation programs (such as Upward Bound, Multicultural Excellence Program)	31%
Other mentoring programs	10%
Boy or Girl Scouts	4%
Youth employment programs	21%

Impact on Self

Many of the ways in which the students reported that the Chosen to Achieve program helped them to become better people involved improving their attitude (Table 12). A third of the students indicated that by working with their mentors they were able to improve their attitude and behavior towards others. Many other students reported that being involved in Chosen to Achieve helped to improve their outlook on life, and their self-esteem. Some reported an improved attitude with regards to school. Some students did indicate that the program did not help them and other students were not sure.

Kept me positive, always wanting to do positive things and stay active.

I respect people more, I didn't have respect for older people, but now I do.

Because my mentor said... it wasn't good to sit back and let everything pass you, or something like that. In 7th grade I didn't have good grades but in 8th grade they were really good.

Before I really had attitude problems, mostly they helped me settle myself down and stuff. It was really my mentor, helped me with my grammar a little bit.

For one, if it wasn't for Chosen to Achieve, I'd still be in 8th grade or a special ed class. I just want to thank Chosen to Achieve for helping me and people I know who were in the program with me.

Taught me how to keep up with my grades, made homework easier – do it now instead of waiting.

Made me focus more on doing hair because this program helped me decide what to do as a career.

It helped me look at school and learning in a different perspective. It made me look at how keeping my grades up will help me when I get older.

Table 12: In what ways, if any do you think your experience with Chosen to Achieve helped you become a better person?

How helped to become better person?	Percent of Students
Improved attitude towards others, and/or behavior	33%
Improved outlook on life, and/ or improve self-esteem	24 %
Reported having a better attitude towards school	13%
Did not know	15%
Did not help	13 %

When asked if their participation in the program changed the way they viewed themselves, half of the students felt that they were more confident and think more highly of themselves today (Table 13). Some of the other students also stated that being in Chosen to Achieve has helped them to become more motivated.

I feel better about my self now. I believe in myself and I have faith in myself.

It made me a stronger person, it made me push and strive for what I need in my education.

It made me know that I can do as well as other people.

It didn't really like, affect me, I feel happy that I was in the program. I feel more happy it can help other people.

Before Chosen to Achieve I felt I was not good enough to go to college because my grades were not very good, but since the program I feel my grades are good enough and that I can go to college and succeed.

I am more confident in school with the work and the books. I am more confident in myself; I feel like I know more.

I can achieve my goals, I can make what I want to have happen, and don't let people put me down.

As far as my past, it affected me in a good way. I've been changing my ways. I'm not doing what I used to be doing.

Table 13: In what ways, if any, has your experience with chosen to achieve affected how you feel about yourself today?

Better person?	Percent of Students
Report feeling more confident, and/or having improved self-esteem	50%
Indicated that they feel more motivated to achieve.	16.6%
Reported no impact on how they feel about themselves today.	14.5%
Gave no answer, or did not know.	12.5%

Social relations in school and at home

When it came to social relationships at school, many of the students reported that working with Chosen to Achieve helped them to improve their ability to communicate with others, and also helped them to have more respect and understanding for others (Table 14). Many students also stated that they have a more positive view of adults and teachers and are better able to communicate with them. Some students indicated that the program did not affect how they relate to others.

I'm not as judgmental as I was before.

I know more. To treat people how I want them to treat me.

It affected me a lot because I didn't talk to older people just kids my age & I started opening up to older people.

It made me see teachers in a way, just to try and help me, not against me.

It helped me relate to teachers at school, I really didn't care about teachers, cause I had an attitude problem, cussing teachers out in class, but it changed me to the way I am now, I don't cuss teachers out anymore.

Helped me talk more to people instead of sitting around being quiet.

At first, I used to think my teachers were always picking on me, my mentor would sit down and talk to me, if I want them to stop picking on me I have to do the right thing.

I learned to respect my teachers more and show more gratitude toward them, but I'm still a little snappy.

I get along with everybody. A lot of people like me because of my attitude. I treat everyone the same.

Table 14: In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you relate to people at school (teachers and peers)?

How relate to people at school?	Percent of Students
Able to communicate better with teachers and peers, or have more respect for others.	48%
Have improved attitude towards adults and teachers.	21%
No affect on how relate to others.	19%
Expressed dissatisfaction with school	6%
Did not know.	2%

The program appears to have had less impact on student's relationships outside of school (Table 15). When asked how their experience affected how they related to people when at home, the most popular answer was that it didn't. Of course, as some students reported, they always got along with others at home, even before they joined the program. However, 38% did indicate a positive outcome with their home life during and after their involvement with Chosen to Achieve. These students acknowledged they showed more respect to their family members, reported a decrease in arguing or cursing, or an improvement in relating to family members.

Taught me that I did need to respect my family more because I did have a smart mouth (I was told that when it came down to it and I needed someone), when no one else was there, my family would be.

I have a lot of respect for people at home, so I really don't do outrageous stuff.

I don't talk down to sisters. Well, I still do, but I talk to them the way I want to be talked to. I try to show them the same things Mrs. Young showed me, that they can do anything they want to be.

The relationship with my parents got better and we got closer. It made me realize that they weren't on me to be on me. They were on me to be a better person.

I have good relationships with people at my house.

At home I try to help my little brother & sister if they are having trouble with their stuff I tell them that if they work hard they can succeed & be successful in life.

Ah, they just... at home they think I'm mature more about everything, the older ones, and how I changed. I would fight with my family about everything. And I ask myself why would I do something stupid like fight with my own family? Now I relate to them.

I show my mom more respect too, I help out.

My mom really liked it a lot. It affected her a lot, she liked going to the banquet, she thought it was good for me to get involved in an African American group. She liked talking with Anna (Mrs. Young). Mom usually stays home.

Table 15: In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you relate to people when you are at home?

Effect how relate at home?	Percent of Students
No change	46%
Positive change	38%
I don't know	8%
Show/have more respect	13%
Decrease in negative behavior (e.g., arguing, swearing)	8%
Better at relating with others	10%
Increase in positive behavior (e.g., helping out, being nice)	8%

Plans for the Future

When asked whether they planned to graduate from high school, 96% said yes (2 students chose not to answer the question). When asked what they plan to do after they leave high school, the majority (94%) indicated they had definite plans; 79% plan on going to college or trade school (64% college). Many participants had specific majors or careers in mind, including accounting, psychology, business, medicine, art/music/dance, chef, law, sports, military, and cosmetology. The majority (81%) felt that their mentor was an important influence on these plans (Table 16)

Table 16: How important was your mentor in influencing your plans for your future?

How important?	Percent of Students
Not important	2%
Slightly important	15%
Important	46%
Very important	35%

In the interviews, students expressed an increased awareness of the importance of planning for the future as a result of participation in the program (Table 17). Some students talked about how their mentor encouraged and supported them to succeed in school and in life. Two students said that they wanted to help by mentoring other young people such as themselves. A small percentage of students reported no change in their thoughts about the future, and one student reported a negative experience. This student was told that he/she would be put in contact with a mentor working in the occupation that the student was interested in pursuing, but was disappointed that it didn't work out.

I always thought I was gonna go to college, but now I know I am going to college.

A lot! They helped me to decide if I want to be a doctor or a lawyer and what college I want to go to.

It helped me look further into it. It made me look at what I can do, what I'd like to do, and what fits me the most.

If I continue to get the grades I am getting, it will help get into college. If I keep playing and stick to basketball, that would help me in the future too.

Helped you think a lot about it. Push you to do better. If you were doing good... great. If you do better in junior high, you will do better in high school, so that when you graduate you have a good record.

Well, I have always wanted to be a lawyer. Mrs. Young told me I could be anything, but with my behavior it would take you longer. [I need to] be strong enough to do that.

Make me really focus on what I wanna do in the future. Wanna go into business, my own.

It influenced a lot, helped me think about the colleges I want to go to, which ones have sports, or to get better education.

Table 17. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen To Achieve influenced how you think about your future?

Influence thoughts about future	Percent of Students
Think about/plan for future	40%
Going to college	23%
Don't know/didn't change	15%
Stressed importance of getting good grades	8%
Feel encouraged/supported	8%
Want to become mentors	4%
Had negative response	2%

Student Suggestions for Program Improvement

When asked what they didn't like about their experience, 70% said they would not change anything about the program or that they liked everything, including their mentor(s) (Table 18). They even said they wished the program was longer or that they could meet more often with their mentors. Their experiences with their mentors were of benefit to them. However, a few felt that their mentors were not very supportive of them, and their needs. There were a few participants who commented on the late assignment of mentors and/or no assignment at all; they felt this to be the only negative experience of the program. Some said there should be more frequent scheduling of sessions with their mentors, which would allow for better relationships to be formed and continued.

I got one too late. Everyone else had a mentor like a month before I did.

No, I liked everything.

We didn't meet enough. We should have more meetings. Get to know each other from different schools.

That I never got a mentor.

What I didn't like was that they only came like, twice every month or twice every two months, you know. And when I'm getting in trouble in school and I wanna talk about it, about why, and I mean I do my work but.....

I didn't like how they stopped coming, after 3 or 4 visits I didn't have one anymore.

Yes, that they didn't see me often. I think the program should be longer.

I didn't like it because my mentor only showed up three times and we didn't really talk about school.

Program didn't last long enough.

I wish I could've seen my mentor more often

Table 18: Is there anything you did not like about the program or your experience with your mentor(s)? (If yes...what?)

Did not like?	Percent of Students
Would not change anything about the program or liked everything including their mentor(s)	70%
If they had been able to be placed with a mentor eventually their experience would have been better	12 %
Time allotted with mentors was not sufficient to build a relationship	10 %
Mentors were not very supportive of them, and their needs.	6 %
Did not like the classes that were required.	2 %

Similarly, when asked what should be changed, responses indicated that the majority of participants were pretty satisfied with the program (Table 19). The most often requested change would be to continue the program into high school. Several participants indicated it would be especially helpful in 9th and 10th grades because they felt it would help people to stay on track. Students would like to see the program expand by adding more mentors so more students could benefit from the program like they did (this was also the most common answer when asked if they had anything else they would like to say). Comments about mentors included: everyone should receive a mentor, the mentors should show up consistently, and that the mentors should be more organized and engaged in the program. One student suggested mentor sharing as an option.

No, it was a good program. It shouldn't change because it ran nicely. He came every 2 weeks and it was good. Maybe have more time, like once a week.

I would like to see if I could have it in high school.

I think she should make sure everyone's mentor shows up.

Make sure that everybody gets a mentor.

Bring it to high school.

No, I think everything is great. The program can grow, everything can grow. Reach more kids, more mentors. There are a lot of kids who are in the same place I was.

I think she should put it in high school. Kids are going to totem town and jail. It can keep kids outta jail. Put it in 9th or 10th grade, do it for them, it'd be better. In 11th and 12th grade kids are doing something else, but for 9th or 10th grade, you know.

Not really, I think she should have more field trips. Other than that she's doing a good job. They should have more college tours.

Table 19: Is there anything you think Anna should change about the program or do differently?

Anything you would like to see changed?	Percent of Students
No	42%
Extend the program into high school	19%
Meet with mentors more often	10%
Discussed aspects of mentors in this program	17%
More activities outside of school such as field trips w/other schools and college visits	8%
Continue receiving the newsletter after the program	2%
More fun/enthusiasm	2%
Evaluate the program closer to program ending	4%
Fewer classes/don't make me do things I don't want to do	2%

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the interviews with students and the authors' interactions with and knowledge of the program, the following recommendations or suggestions can be made.

- 1. Expand the program into 9th and 10th grade in order to better facilitate positive adaptation to the high school environment and curriculum.***

Expansion of the program would assist in accomplishing several goals of the mentoring program and the St. Paul school district. First, it can further support the transition of the target students to the demands of the high school academic environment. The transition to high school is stressful, a time when students can be at risk of academic failure and associated consequences (i.e., drop-out). Continuing the mentorship relationship through this stressful period can enhance the students' capacity to continue to achieve, thereby supporting academic success and the likely outcome of graduation. Second, continuing the community's involvement with the students as they transition to high school would reinforce the community's staying power and long-term commitment to the success of these students. Community commitment to education is a critical factor in maintaining quality schools and academic environments for today's youth. Expanding the partnership between the community and the school district may be an important step in diminishing current educational disparities. And, finally it would allow students who are at a critical juncture in their development continued access to a positive, supportive adult figure. It may be this relationship that makes the difference in whether a student decides to continue to achieve rather than drop out.

- 2. Continue to improve efforts at recruitment, support, guidance and follow-up with mentors in order to reduce experiences of non-mentoring or ineffective mentoring (inconsistent meetings, no shows, lack of contact, etc.).***

This is especially important in light of the research highlighting the negative impact on self-esteem of ineffective mentoring on youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). The downfall of every mentoring program is the quality of the mentoring relationship. As with most mentoring programs, Chosen to Achieve relies heavily on volunteers. Volunteers differ in the ability to follow through on their commitment overtime. That is why good volunteer management, and the resources that are needed to do quality volunteer management are critical to the success of mentoring programs. Given the level of commitment that the majority of students indicated that their mentors had for their success, the Chosen to Achieve program has accomplished tremendous volunteer commitment and follow-through. Yet, there is room for improvement. The addition of personnel with similar commitment, drive, vision, personality and ability to connect with people in the way that the current Director does so readily, would help the program to nurture the talents and commitment of its current volunteers, while allowing time for the intensive job of recruiting and training new volunteers and all the other tasks associated with delivering this program.

3. *Continue to offer opportunities for mentees to gather and meet with each other, both with-in and across the various schools.*

Because the mentees who were interviewed were strongly in favor of planned activities with their other program participants and their mentors suggests that these opportunities function well to build a sense of community among the participants in the program. Youth need peers who are striving to meet the same goals as they are. Providing activities for youth who are striving to achieve to meet each other, both within and across school settings, help youth to see that they are not alone in their desires and struggles to do well academically. In today's youth culture, achieving academically can leave a student as an outcast, with little support from their peers to continue to nurture their intellect. The Chosen to Achieve program should continue to provide opportunities for students to find each other and develop new friendships, ones that support their goal to achieve.

4. *Identify ways in which students, families and mentors can continue to celebrate together the success of the mentees and their involvement with the program (e.g., banquet), more often than once a year.*

Celebrations could be around noted accomplishments during the year (i.e. completion of certain testing protocols or service activities), annual events or holidays (i.e. Kwanzaa), and even special anniversaries or birthdays. Celebrations afford the opportunity for reflection and for expressions of appreciation, two critical dimensions for the growth of the program and the participants.

Together with outings and gatherings not necessarily focused on celebration, bringing program participants together may also provide a convenient framework for relationship-building between mentors and mentees. Students talked about how they wished that they had more time with their mentors. Gatherings and outings provide such opportunities,

while at the same time allowing mentors to talk with one another, students to meet other students.

By bringing people together to celebrate and meet one another, the program can engage participants in the process building community, fostering connectedness that leads to a strong sense of community. Building a strong sense of community within the program can help to provide members with a positive identity, sense of belonging, trust, and commitment that can transcend the immediate intent of the program, go beyond academic achievement to developing future leadership, community commitment and involvement, and life-long success.

5. *Make African American culture and community a more transparent element within the program.*

This element is a core feature of the Chosen to Achieve program; as such it needs to be made more explicit, not only in terms of the race of the selected mentors, but also in terms of the activities and celebrations. Culturally-focused programming can facilitate accomplishing the positive cultural consciousness goal of the program. Also, the program should continue to support and help the mentors to identify and talk about positive conceptions of the African American culture and experience with their mentees.

Research has shown that a strong positive cultural identity is related to positive self-esteem and success at school (Thomas, Townsend, & Belgrave, 2003; Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004). A strong cultural identification works to buffer the impact of ethnic discrimination on school success (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, A., 2003). Youth with positive in-group conceptions coupled with a strong racial identity and an awareness of societal biases against their racial group are more likely to do well academically (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003). Further, gender differences may be at play, such that positive racial identity coupled with a perception that strong academic achievement is part of that racial identity is especially important for the academic success of girls (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001). The mentoring experience can help the youth gain a positive connection with their cultural identity and help them to work through their understandings of cultural bias in society. Through the mentoring relationship, the student can gain the knowledge and motivation to succeed in life in our highly race-conscious society.

6. *Provide opportunities for parents to meet and support one another.*

Such exchanges and connections, particularly those between parents and mentors, have been highlighted as crucial to the success of some highly effective mentoring programs (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). Further, some students said that what was important to them about the program was how their parents were given opportunities to meet other people and engage in community activities. Part of building community is providing opportunities for people to come together to meet and socialize, share their stories and help one another. The Chosen to Achieve program could provide the impetus

for parents to come together, thus supporting each other in their efforts to help their children to achieve.

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Appendix

Letter to Parents

Dear _____,

Thank you, as a parent, for allowing your child to participate in Chosen to Achieve. This is one of the many efforts Saint Paul Public Schools uses to support African American children.

It is now time to look back over the program in order to gain understanding and make improvements to Chosen to Achieve. These follow up activities are a promise made in the grant that Saint Paul Public Schools submitted to the U.S. Dept. of Education.

Our goal is to gather information from as many former mentees as possible to help us with the ongoing efforts of the program. This information is completely confidential and your child's name and information will be kept private.

We would like to talk with your child about their experience with Chosen to Achieve and how they are now doing in school. The interview will take place at school and last about 15-30 minutes. Your child does not have to answer any questions that they don't want to. Faculty and students from Metropolitan State University will be doing the interviews for us.

We ask that you please tell your child that we will be at their school on _____ and we are interested in talking with them about their experience with the project.

If you do not want us talking with your child and asking them questions about their experience with Chosen to Achieve, please contact our office at 651-293-5952 and we will take their name off the interview list. Your current or future relationship with Chosen to Achieve will not be affected.

As always, I would like to thank you for your continued support of this very important program for our children.

Sincerely,

Anna M. Young
Program Director

Survey Cover Letter



Hello,

It has been a while since you were a part of the Chosen to Achieve program and we are wondering how you are doing. We would like to talk to you about your experience with the program. What you tell us will help us to better understand and make improvements in Chosen to Achieve. We are at your school today and would like to talk with you and ask you a few questions.

If you are willing to help us, we ask that you answer the questions on the attached paper. This will take about 5 minutes. When you finish, a student or teacher from Metropolitan State University will ask you some questions about your experiences while you were in the Chosen to Achieve program. The people from Metropolitan State will take notes about what you say, leaving out names or other identifiers, and then they will give those notes to the program. All of your answers will be kept confidential.

The entire interview should take no more than 30 minutes. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can stop the interview at any time. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you have any questions or concerns, raise your hand and someone from Metropolitan State University will come over to help.

If you would like to help us, please complete the attached survey and give it to the person who interviews you. After the interview, if you have any questions about the interview or the project you can contact the Chosen to Achieve office at 651-293-5952. You can keep this letter.

Thank you,

Anna Young
Program Director

Survey

Please answer these questions as best you can. You don't have to answer any question you do not want, but your answers are important and we appreciate what you have to tell us. We want to know what you think and how you feel about your experience with Chosen to Achieve. Feel free to add comments with your answers if it will help us to understand your experience.

1. During what school years did you actually meet with a mentor more than once? Circle all that apply.

7th grade

8th grade

2. How many different mentors did have when you were with Chosen to Achieve?

3. How important was your mentor(s) in helping you succeed at school?

1	2	3	4
Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important

4. How important has your relationship with your mentor(s) been to you?

1	2	3	4
Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important

5. How important is it to you that your mentors were African American?

1	2	3	4
Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important

6. How important was your mentor(s) in influencing your plans for your future?

1	2	3	4
Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important

7. Have you participated in any of the following kinds of programs while you have been in high school? Circle your answer for each item.

Tutoring/homework help after school or on weekends.....	NO	YES
Summer school.....	NO	YES
College preparation programs (such as Upward Bound or Multicultural Excellence Program, MEP)	NO	YES
Other mentoring programs.....	NO	YES
Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.....	NO	YES
Youth employment programs.....	NO	YES

8. How old are you now? _____ years

9. What grade in high school are you currently in? _____ grade

10. How are you doing in your classes? Circle your answer.

1. Not very good
2. OK
3. Pretty good
4. Really good

11. Do you plan to graduate from high school? Circle your answer.

NO YES Don't know

12. What are your plans for after you leave high school?

Interview Script

Chosen to Achieve Interviewer Instructions

Introduce yourself and explain the goals of the interview....

Hello, my name is _____. I'm helping out Chosen to Achieve today and would like to ask you some questions. We're interested in what Achievers think about the program and their experience now that they are in high school. Your answers are valuable to the program and may be used in their reports to funders and school officials. Your identity will be kept private; your name will not be associated with your answers or in any reports. Is it ok to ask you some questions?

If they say yes, proceed to explain the process of the interview to them...
(If no, thank them and stop the interview)

"Since many people have never been in an interview just like this, let me read you a paragraph that tells a little bit about how it works. I am going to read you a set of questions exactly as they are worded so that every person we are interviewing is answering the same question. After I ask you a question, I will write down your answer using your own words. To help me, please don't speak too fast, and I may have to ask you to repeat some of your answer so that I can be sure to write it down accurately and not leave anything out. We only have about 15-20 minutes for this interview, so you'll need to keep your answers brief so we can be sure to get your answers to all of the questions. If at any time during the interview, you are not clear about what is wanted, be sure to ask me. Also, you do not have to answer any question you do not want to, and you can stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions before we get started?" (Answer any questions they may have)

FAQs

1. Any question about how the program....
"I can't answer that question now, but I can find out for you after the interview is done."
2. Why is the program doing the interview?
"We want to find out how people are doing now that they are no longer in Chosen to Achieve. Your answers will help the program make improvements and also provide necessary information about the impact of the program on the participants. This information is required by the grant that funded the project."
3. Who are you?
"I am a student at Metropolitan State University and have volunteered to help the project do the interviews."

4. Will people associated with the program (e.g. Anna or their mentor) see my answers or know how they answered the question?

“No, all of the answers everyone gives us will be typed up and then summarized for the program. No names will be included. Your name will not be associated with any of your answers.”

Once you know that you have answered their questions, ask:

Is it ok if we begin the interview? (If yes, start the interview; if no, thank them for their time and tell them where to go to get a pass back to their classroom).

Chosen to Achieve Mentee Interview Questions

1. Since I don't know anything about the experience you had with Chosen to Achieve, could you tell me a little about it? What were the things you and your mentor(s) did or talked about?
2. What did you most enjoy about the program or your experience with your mentor(s)?
3. What about the program or your experience with your mentor(s) helped you the most?
4. Is there anything you did not like about the program or your experience with your mentor(s)? (If yes...what?)
5. What was it like for you having (an) African American mentor(s)?
6. In what ways, if any, do you think your experience with Chosen to Achieve helped you become a better student?
7. In what ways, if any, do you think your experience with Chosen to Achieve helped you become a better person?
8. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve influenced how you think about your future?
9. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you feel about yourself today?
10. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you relate to people at school (teachers and peers)?
11. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you relate to people when you are at home?

12. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Chosen to Achieve affected how you feel or think about the African American community?
13. Is there anything you think Anna should change about the program or do differently?
14. Is there anything you would like to tell us about your experience or what you think about the program that you haven't already said?