

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

In 2002-2003, the Saint Paul Public Schools came together with the African American community to address concerns about changing demographics and how schools might best respond to these changes. During a planning process involving school staff and community members, an adult-youth mentoring program was suggested as a strategy to support greater academic achievement for African American students attending schools in these neighborhoods.

Chosen to Achieve is a school-based, culturally specific mentoring program located in the Saint Paul Public Schools, the second largest school district in Minnesota. Two African American adult mentors work with an African American youth who is in the 7th or 8th grades and enrolled at one of eight middle schools that offer the program. Caring mentors (240 adults) provide emotional support and direction for the purposes of strengthening students' (120 students) hope, motivation, commitment, and academic achievement.

The Chosen to Achieve program philosophy consists of:

- o Offering a culturally specific program based in history and values of the African American community,
- o Strengthening the capacity of young people to reach their potential,
- o Building relationships at all levels of the program (from the community and school level to the mentor-mentee relationship),
- o Implementing a shared model of leadership, and
- o Relying on collaborative relationships to share the risks as well as the rewards.

The Chosen to Achieve core programming components consist of:

- ❖ African American adults mentoring African American youth
- ❖ Linking two adult mentors with each youth mentee
- ❖ On-site mentoring at the student's school
- ❖ Mentors meeting with each mentee twice a month for a minimum of one hour every two weeks or a maximum of one hour each week
- ❖ School staff nominating youth who might benefit from a mentoring relationship to augment their leadership and academic potential
- ❖ Team Leaders guiding programming and overseeing mentors

Evaluating the Chosen to Achieve Program

In 2004, the Saint Paul Public School District received a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, to expand the Chosen to Achieve program into additional middle schools and demonstrate it's effectiveness. Christa Treichel, Ph.D., Cooperative Ventures, serves as the external evaluator for the

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

grant. As part of the evaluation component of the grant, students, mentors, teachers, and school district staff have had the opportunity to share their perspectives about the program's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, school record data (student grades, behavior, and attendance) is monitored monthly and analyzed on an annual basis to report on program outcomes. Finally, Chosen to Achieve graduates and parents of students will have an opportunity to provide input about the program in 2006-2007.

The Chosen to Achieve program is still in its implementation and expansion phase. However, the evaluation findings presented on the following pages begin to help us understand the ways in which a culturally-specific mentoring program, embedded in a the public school system and supported by the African American community, helps support students succeed in school and in life. Students and mentors are developing strong relationships, school support for the program is evident, and students in the program are benefiting personally and in terms of their academic achievement.

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

Results From Students and Mentors

- **76% (during the 05-06 school year) to 92% (during the 04-05 school year) of students and mentors maintained a relationship for at least one year.**

The mentor-student relationship is the foundation of the Chosen to Achieve program. If positive things happen, it will happen because the relationship is consistent and meaningful. Research on mentoring states that relationships lasting less than a year aren't as effective as relationships that last one year or longer. Over the past two years, more than three-quarters of mentees have maintained their relationship with at least one mentor for one year or longer.

- **Students and mentors describe each other as "friends", feel close to one another, and say they talk about school the most when they meet.**

There is great consistency about what mentors and students say about their relationship. The majority of both students and mentors pick the label of "friend" to describe each other, they describe their relationship as "close" or "very close", and when it comes to the time they spend together, school is the topic discussed most often.

- **80% of mentors interviewed believe they are making a positive difference in the life of the student they mentor.**

Mentors are not only volunteers, they are busy people both personally and professionally and feeling like their time is well spent may very well support their significant commitment to their mentee and to the Chosen to Achieve program.

- **In 2004-2005, 45% of CTA students showed a decrease in their unexcused absences and in 2005-2006, 33% of CTA students showed a decrease in their unexcused absences.**

Over the last two years, anywhere from about a third of the students in Chosen to Achieve to almost half of the students show fewer unexcused absences over time. This means that while they are involved in Chosen to Achieve, there is a decrease in the amount of time students are missing school when they are not excused.

- **In 2004-2005, 29% of students improved in English and 22% improved in Math (39% of students improved in other subjects).**
- **In 2005-2006, 41% of students improved in English and 29% improved in Math (44% of students improved in other subjects).**

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

There are two important findings about student grades: one, students are improving their grades and two, there was greater improvement in grades in year two of the grant compared to year one.

At the close of the 2005-2006 school year, eighth-grade students (who were graduating from the Chosen to Achieve program) were asked about how their mentors helped them with school- and non-school related issues. Students were mostly likely to say that their mentors helped them improve their school grades, their school behavior, and attendance or getting to school on time. Some of the quotes from students were, "My mentor has helped me turn in work, stay organized, and bring up my grades" and "Being in Chosen to Achieve increased my attendance, behavior at school and my grades are better."

In terms of non-school-related support, mentors are mostly likely to help students think about their future as illustrated in the student comment, "I know I am definitely going to college. I wasn't, but now I am." Mentors also help students with family issues as one student explained, "I started treating my parents with more respect." Additional areas of support included talking about African American culture and making good choices.

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

Results From School Administrators, Principals, and Key Contacts

Chosen to Achieve staff, in the second year of the three-year federal grant, directed the program's external evaluation team to gather feedback from District staff (administrators, principals, and school contacts) to enhance program implementation. This summary highlights the main themes from the interviews.

District staff who were interviewed (administrators, principals, and school contacts)...

...recognize the uniqueness of the program design, commend staff leadership, and see evidence of partnering strategies in program operations.

Quote: "The two-to-one mentor-mentee ratio is key to this program—mentors who visit the student together and at the same time."

...believe in the value of offering culturally specific mentoring for 7th and 8th grade students.

Quote: "This program offers kids role models, encouragement, and holds them accountable. ...It's also important because we have so few staff of color in the District."

...are concerned about mentees having enough contact with mentors—that each mentee have two mentors and that the mentors and mentees visit at least two times a month.

Quote: "This has an impact on kids who start excited and engaged, but when the mentors don't show ... These are kids who have experience with loss in their life. This feels like another abandonment. Kids get frustrated and disengaged."

...want regular updates about the program (primarily principals and school contacts).

Quote: "I want to see grades, discipline, what kind of positive outcomes there are for students."

...recognize the importance of partnering with the African American community.

Chosen to Achieve

Evaluation Fact Sheet

Quote: "The mentors are lending their support and time and this has a ripple effect back into the community. We are building a community partnership."

Comments From Classroom Teachers

Teachers have the opportunity to provide feedback about the students in Chosen to Achieve twice a month via survey that is used by mentors and by program staff to understand how students are performing in the classroom. Teachers rate students on their participation, completion of homework, behavior, punctuality, preparedness, and a variety of other areas. The following comments are taken from surveys teachers completed during the 2005-2006 school year.

Quote: Student always asks how he can do better, but then he's instantly off-task. He seems to have a hard time paying attention and getting to work. He is an intelligent individual.

Quote: Needs to come in for lessons. Student is on track. No concerns! Awesome! Keep working hard.

Quote: Usually does pretty good in class participation. Keeps trying until gets a better grade.