Investigation into the Effectiveness of a Mentoring Program

An Action Research Project

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Background and Rationale

William Penn High School is located in northern Delaware in New Castle county.

Approximately 2200 hundred students attend, with a professional and support staff of

about 200. The mission of the Colonial School District is that "students shall be

empowered to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The district goal is "to improve the

academic achievement of all students.

William Penn High School serves a diverse population. During the 2004 school year

the race/ethnicity breakdowns were as follows: American Indian .5%, African American

42.9%, Asian American 3.2%, Hispanic 8.8% and White 44.6%. Approximately 34% of

the students come from low-income homes.

Under the Delaware School Accountability System, the William Penn High School

rating status is: Academic Watch – Under School Improvement. (See Table 1)

The school academic achievement team identified the need to provide support to

students who would be borderline students (students receiving a 2 in an area on the

Delaware Student Testing Program). There is already a school tutoring program in place

for low scoring students (students receiving a 1 in an area on the DSTP). There is also a

DSTP preparation class during the school day for those students who are low scoring in

either reading or math. A mentoring program was proffered to give those borderline

students who were not eligible for the tutoring program or the DSTP preparation class

additional support outside of the classroom. The program was initiated in November of

2004 and continued through March 2005.

Purpose and Goal

The purpose of this action research paper is to investigate the effectiveness of the mentoring program at William Penn High School as it is presently used and to make recommendations on how to improve the program to best meet the needs of the students who are targeted for mentoring. The students who will be identified for mentoring will be those who received a score of 2 on any portion of the Delaware State Assessment (DSTP). The goal is to refine the mentoring process to adequately meet the needs of these students.

What Research States

According to MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, a project funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, in order to begin a successful mentoring program, the following guidelines need to be followed:

- Design the parameters for the program, including who is mentored, who is mentoring, when, where, and for how long mentoring occurs, the outcomes of the mentoring partnership, assessing the program, and mentoring protocol for contact

- Plan the program management, including policies and procedures, staff development, funding, and auditing of fund use.

- Implement the program, including recruiting mentors and participants, matching partnerships of mentors and students, providing ongoing support and supervision, reaching a closure with mentors and students.

- Plan the evaluation, including evaluation design, data collection, effectiveness of program, and reflection

Part of designing the parameters for the mentoring program includes establishing communications and essentially marketing the program (MENTOR/National Mentoring

Partnership, 2005). General research into other mentoring programs nationwide elicited a high success rate for mentoring programs with teens. Most programs cited the interaction with professional, successful adults as positively influencing the students. William Penn has taken the first step in developing a mentoring program.

The Current Program

The mentoring program established for the 2004-2005 consisted of identifying those students who were considered borderline for passing the DSTP. Students who would meet a variety of cells under No Child Left Behind were specifically identified. A list of these students was submitted to the entire staff in the initial call for mentors. Staff who were interested in mentoring were asked to identify students with whom they had a relationship and would be interested in mentoring. Mentors and students were later matched up by the administrative team. Some mentors had a previous relationship with their student and some did not. Some students were matched with mentors who applied specifically to the student's area of weakness (i.e. a math teacher matched to a student who needed math assistance). Most were not matched thus. The guidelines for mentoring were very general. This program was not to take up a considerable amount of time, but was to be another support for the students in preparing for success on the DSTP. Mentors were asked to meet with the student at least four times prior to the DSTP and submit those dates. Mrs. Bowe and Ms. Evans interviewed eight or nine mentors to ascertain the specific activities. What these specific mentoring activities were to be was left up to the individual staff mentor. Different staff reported different activities. Mrs. Bowe mentored a student whom she had in class. Their mentoring activities consisted of specifically pulling the student aside during class to talk about DSTP and other concerns the student had. She also spoke

with the student outside of class when the student would pass by her in the hallway. Other mentors reported sending their mentee students notes and meeting after school. Ms. Evans was not assigned to a specific student to mentor; she provided math support for other mentors and worked with a variety of students after school to this end. The results for the mentoring program are inconclusive, as the average scores for the students in the program did not widely deviate from the average scores of all the tenth grade students who took the DSTP in 2005. Most students did not know they were being targeted to be mentored until the mentoring staff approached the student. Most parents surveyed were unaware of the mentoring. The survey was one of our tools to determine the success of the program. The survey was completed prior to DSTP scored being released.

In this survey given to approximately fifty 10th grade, twenty-five11th grade, twenty 12th grade students, 10th grade parents (of the fifty surveyed 10th graders), and the faculty of William Penn, we asked a variety of questions regarding the DSTP and mentoring. Our goal with this survey was two fold – to discover current perceptions about the role of mentors in student success on the DSTP and to discover anecdotal evidence of students who had been mentored, parents whose students were mentored and then teachers who mentored.

Questions on the survey were as follows:

➢ Comment on the following statement: "Teachers mentoring students outside of class can increase student confidence for taking tests."

➢ What is your opinion on the state tests? Are they too difficult, too easy, just right? Are they fair/unfair?

- Many statements have been reported about a student's graduation being affected by these state tests. What are your thoughts on this issue?

- Teachers at William Penn have been asked to volunteer to mentor one or two students in preparation for the DSTP. Should this program be mandatory for all staff? Why or why not?

- What do you think might be able to improve William Penn's teacher/student mentoring program

Four other questions were specifically directed at students who were mentored, staff who mentored, and parents of students (irregardless of participation in the mentoring program). These questions were to determine what each believed they had done in the mentoring program or what their perceptions were of the mentoring program and their participation in the program (or their child's participation).

Based on the results of the survey, there appears to be perception issues among students, parents and teachers as to what the mentoring program is about. Most teachers and parents did not want to see mentoring as mandatory. Reasons given included: teachers having too many responsibilities lack of pay/compensation and lack of motivation from teachers. Parents with misperceptions about the test were unaware of the format of the test; unaware of the types of questions; unaware of the level of difficulty and unaware of how the DSTP and curriculum mirror each other. There was a need seen to increase the student comfort and confidence with the test. Students need a sense that they are important and not a number. In having a mentor, the students sense that another adult is invested in their future even after high school.

Recommendations from the survey were:

➢ To offer mentoring before or after school at least twice a week.

➢ The math help should be more specific

➢ Familiarize students with the testing format

➢ DSTP "Prep" classes are needed (in addition to regular classes for all tenth grade students)

<div align="center">Evaluation and Recommendations</div>

Our evaluation is the programs major success is in its establishment as we now have a basis upon which to expand and refine the program; however we were not successful in meeting the needs of a large percentage of our mentored students and the stated goal of improving DSTP scores for these students. Three students of the twenty-three mentored improved in reading from not meeting the standard in ninth grade to meeting the standard on the tenth grade DSTP. Two students of the twenty-three mentored improved in math from not meeting the standard in ninth grade to meeting the standard on tenth grade DSTP. Eight students met the standards in reading in ninth grade continued to meet the standards in tenth grade. Two students who met the math standards in ninth grade continued to meet the standards in tenth grade. Eighteen students met the standards in writing in both ninth and tenth grades. (See Table 2) What is the significance of this information? It shows us that we must consider other areas that factor into the success of a mentoring program other than DSTP scores. Our survey results indicated some of the other factors that we must consider for next year's mentoring program, including eventually extending the mentorship beyond tenth grade in both directions (to the middle schools and to the upper high school grades as students prepare for life after high school).

The recommendations of this action research are:

➢ Specify the role of the mentor

➢ Communicate more effectively with home about goals, roles, time allotment, student/parent responsibilities

➢ Provide group activities throughout the year before and after DSTP

➢ Enlist more teachers (many support staff on mentoring list this year)

➢ Provide more guidance

➢ Provide sample tests for parents/students to examine at home early in the year as well as closer to March

➢ Match students/mentors early (August)

➢ Observe other successful staff to student mentoring programs in the area

➢ Use school functions as mentoring opportunities (i.e. sports' games, faculty basketball, musical performances, theatrical performances).

We plan on continuing our involvement with this action research project through the 2005-2006 school year. As part of acting upon our findings from the 2004-2005 school year, we are requesting from our administration that we be allowed to manage this mentoring program and facilitate the implementation of the next group of students to be mentored. In as such, we have already requested and received a list of fifty possible rising tenth grade students who did not pass the ninth grade DTSP in one or more areas. We have created a list of possible students to be mentored. We also plan on meeting this summer with the administrator to whom we would report for the program and recreating the

mentoring program in keeping with the recommendations of MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. Furthermore, we plan on facilitating the program throughout the year, focusing on developing activities for students and mentors and developing a more efficient evaluation. We also plan on approaching staff during our initial in-service days in August for participation in the program with an improved sales pitch.

Mentoring at William Penn is just beginning. With a school of 2200 students and 200 staff there is plenty of opportunity for adults to play a positive role in the development of our students. If the staff are committed to the program and the students recognize that William Penn staff are not there "just for the paycheck," we will be able to better reach the community we serve, eventually including adults from the community as mentors. While we are focusing on our borderline DSTP students, staff-to-student mentoring can be expanded even more to connect with the other community based mentoring programs. Then we can perhaps achieve the lofty and worthwhile goal of leaving no child behind.

Table 1: 2004 School Rating AYP

2004 School Rating Status: Academic Watch - Under School Improvement

Adequate Yearly Progress Status: Below Target

Subgroup	ELA % Meeting/Exceeding Standards		ELA % Participation	Math % Meeting/Exceeding Standards		Math % Participation	Graduation Rate
State 2004 Goal	57	Safe Harbor	95	33	Safe Harbor	95	75
All Students	61	M	98	37	M	98	66
American Indian	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Asian American	(75)		(100)	(56)		(100)	
African American	48	N	97	19	N	97	
Hispanic	48	M	98	29	M	98	
White	78	M	99	55	M	99	
Limited English	(19)		(100)	(7)		(108)	
Special Education	14	N	97	9	N	98	
Low Income	42	N	98	21	N	97	

M means this cell met the Target Percentage or this cell met the target percentage with a confidence interval applied and Safe Harbor was not needed

N means this cell did not meet Safe Harbor (did not have a 10% reduction in the # of students who did not meet/exceed standards) OR did not maintain or improve their Other Indicator score

S means this cell did not meet the Target Percentage, but did qualify for Safe Harbor status

∗ means that the number of eligible students was less than 15 and, therefore, not reported

(%) indicate that the number of students in that cell was <40 and was not used in accountability calculations, but was >15 and, therefore

Table from Department of Education

Table two: 2004-2005 Mentored students DSTP scores

	10th grade performance level				8th grade performance level				Difference		
ID	Reading	Math	Writing		Reading	Math	Writing		Reading	Math	Writing
49082	1	2	3		2	2	3		-	b =	=
929898	3	2	4		3	2	3		=	b =	+
139626	2	2	3		3	2	3		-	-	=
832549	2	1	3		3	2	3		-	-	=
523731	3	3	3		2	2	3		+	+	=
31909	3	2	3		3	2	3		=	b =	=
75358	1	1	2		3	2	2		-	-	b =
718185	3	2	3		3	2	3		=	b =	=
28176	2	1	3		2	1	3		b =	b =	=
452056	1	1	3		2	2	3		-	-	=
798817	2	1	3		3	2	3		-	-	=
112800	1	2	2		2	2	3		-	b =	-
906849	3	3	3		2	3	3		+	=	=
1824	1	1	3		2	2	2		-	-	+
290218	2	1	3		3	2	3		-	-	=
533431	3	1	3		3	2	3		=	-	=
846679	1	1	3		2	2	3		-	-	=
200632	3	2	3		3	2	3		=	b =	=
968076	3	3	3		3	2	3		=	+	=
170986	1	2	2		2	2	3		-	b =	-
795746	3	3	3		2	3	3		+	=	=
776283	3	2	3		3	2	3		=	b =	=
823776	3	2	3		3	2	3		=	b =	=
Average score	2.1739	1.7826	2.9130		2.5	2	2.875				

-     score decreased
+   score increased
=   score remained even (meeting the standard)
B =   scored remained even (below the standard)

Table from C. Bowe and M. Evans

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