

Connecticut Mentoring Partnership 2005-2006 Evaluation Results Executive Summary

During the 2005-2006 academic school year, the Connecticut Mentoring Partnership (CMP) conducted a follow-up evaluation of school-based mentoring programs. The total sample consisted of 190 mentored youth from seven school systems.

For this evaluation, four pieces of administrative data were collected from schools in order to assess the possible effects of mentoring on academic outcomes. These data included Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores, report card grades, attendance records, and records of disciplinary infractions. Data from the past three school years were collected in order to examine change over time.

The design of the study allowed researchers from the University of Connecticut to make connections between the new school-outcome data and previously collected self-report data from last year's evaluation by using a portion of the same sample. The anonymity of all students was preserved using previously assigned identification numbers. Self-report data from last year's study included measures of students' connectedness to teachers and parents, students' academic self-concept, and mentor-mentee relationship quality.

This year's evaluation can be considered a pilot study or exploratory study that lays the groundwork for future evaluations while also continuing to make Connecticut a leader in mentoring research. Overall, the 2005-2006 evaluation found positive results for mentoring programs in Connecticut. Programs seem to be targeting youth who are somewhat academically at-risk and are then able to sustain or improve their academic performance during the course of their mentoring relationship, in most cases.

Who Are Programs Serving?

Average scores on the Connecticut Mastery Tests indicate that most students involved in school-based mentoring programs are earning CMT scores that are below the state averages. This may be interpreted as a sign that these students are somewhat at-risk academically and may benefit more from a mentor than students who are not at-risk. Therefore, programs seem to be doing a good job of targeting youth who really can benefit from a supportive relationship with a mentor. In light of the addition of this information about who programs are serving, the findings from last year's evaluation are even more positive as mentees were reporting high levels of satisfaction with their mentors and high levels of connectedness to parents and teachers.

Changes in CMT Scores

Mentored students who have been with their mentors for two years or longer appear to be making the greatest improvements on the Connecticut Mastery Tests. These students made significantly more gains than those who had been mentored less than two years on both the Math and Reading portions of the CMT. However, students who had been mentored for less than 24 months were also showing improvements on the CMT exams.

Changes in Grade Point Average

Mentored students appear to be making modest gains in their grade point averages during the course of their mentoring relationships. When placed on a five-point scale (0.0 – 4.0), average GPA increased approximately one tenth of a point from 2002-2003 to 2004-2005 for students who had been mentored up to 23 months.

Attendance Changes

Students' average attendance remained approximately the same over the 3-year period. However, at 95% attendance rates, the mentored students were already attending school the vast majority of the time, and therefore most did not have problematic attendance records even before being mentored.

Changes in Disciplinary Infractions

It was found that regardless of the length of time students have been mentored, as a whole group, students experience increases in disciplinary problems over time. This increase was found to be an effect of age, not mentoring. As students enter middle and high schools, more disciplinary infractions are recorded and kept on record. Minor disciplinary problems in elementary schools seem to go undocumented.

Connections with Self-Report Data

Improvements in GPA were found to be significantly associated with higher levels of connectedness to teachers and higher academic self-concepts or self-esteem regarding what one can accomplish in school. As one might expect, increases in disciplinary problems were associated with decreases in these same variables. Therefore mentored students who feel increasingly connected to their teachers and positive about their abilities in school are likely to be the same students who are improving their grades and displaying less disciplinary problems.

Validity of Self-Report Data

The previously discussed connections between self-report measures and administrative data support the notion that measuring constructs such as academic self-concept and levels of personal connectedness through self-report tools such as questionnaires is a valid research practice. However, asking students to self-report their improvements in grades, attendance, and disciplinary issues may not be the best way to assess these changes. While youths' self-perceptions are important, they do not always mirror reality. Results of this study indicated no association between these self-reported changes and the data coming from administrative school records. Future researchers should keep this finding in mind as a cautionary tale.