

Findings at a Glance

Evaluations of Cornerstone Mentoring

Mentors promote engagement with school and community

Evaluation of Cornerstone Mentoring has shown how a low-intensity group mentoring approach can change young people's attitudes about education and create a positive, supportive environment for students with low engagement in school. The research firm Policy Studies Associates (PSA) has conducted three evaluations of the program – focused on participant attitudes toward school, attendance in the classroom, and the best practices of volunteer mentors. To assess these areas, the evaluators used DYCD and Department of Education administrative data, program site visits, and surveys of youth in Cornerstone Mentoring, peers not participating in mentoring, and mentors. Together, these studies have demonstrated promising positive outcomes for participants' attitudes and behaviors toward school and their communities.

Key Findings

Compared to their peers participating in Cornerstone center services but not receiving mentoring, middle school Cornerstone Mentoring participants:

- Remained engaged in Cornerstone center programming at significantly higher rates
- More frequently reported high levels of belief in the importance of school and confidence in their ability to succeed academically

PSA also found a correlation between hours of mentoring and improved school attendance, with each 37 hours of mentoring corresponding on average to one more day of school attended.

In addition, the program was found to foster strong mentor engagement, high levels of trust, and positive mentor-mentee relationships.

What is Cornerstone Mentoring?

Cornerstone Mentoring was launched in 2011 as a group mentoring model in which volunteer mentors were matched with 4-5 middle school youth. It is an initiative of the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI), designed in partnership with Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to support youth living in and around public housing during critical school transitions. Participants engage in structured group mentoring, complete service activities, and attend outings or take field trips. The program is delivered as an added service layered into 49 existing Cornerstone community centers and has been expanded to serve high school youth since the research for these evaluations was conducted.

Mentoring Participants Show Improved Attitudes toward School

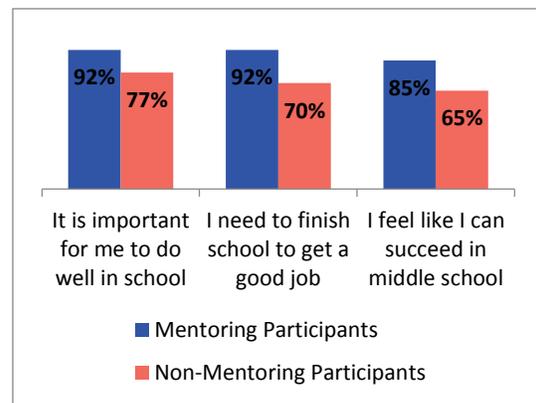
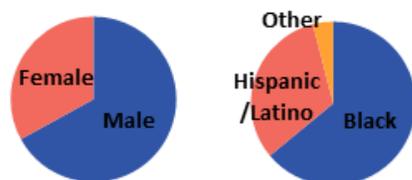


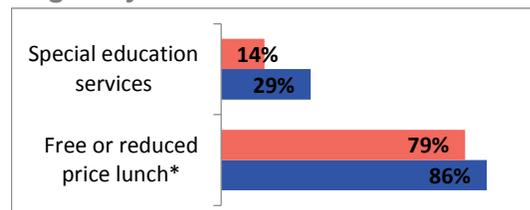
Chart reads: 92 percent of participants reported it to be "very true" it was important for them to do well in school versus 77 percent of a matched comparison group of Cornerstone center youth not participating in mentoring.

Profile of Participants, 2014-2015 School Year

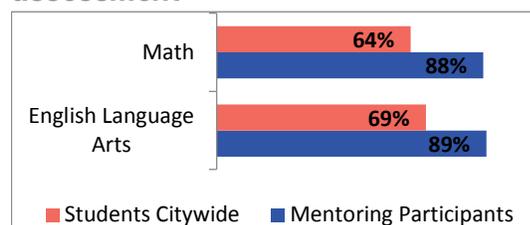
Basic Demographics



Eligibility for services



Scored below proficient on NY State assessment



*Indicator reflects participants in Cornerstone Mentoring eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Citywide comparison reflects students eligible for free or reduced price lunch or for Human Resources Administration benefits.

Best Practices

Evaluation of Cornerstone Mentoring has documented best practices for mentors and mentoring programs.

Mentors

- **Fostering a sense of belonging and safe space** helps to identify and discuss issues that may affect learning including bullying, peer pressure, and student-teacher conflicts.
- **Role-modeling, encouragement, and recognition of effort** help youth develop a sense of self-efficacy and persistence.
- Communicating **high expectations** fosters personal accountability for learning.

Programs

- Locating services in a **community center** facilitates communication between youth and their mentors, as well as among the adults in participants' lives including their families, mentors, and teachers.
- Engaging mentors who value education and are "**credible messengers**" – sharing common backgrounds or experiences with youth – supports positive learning outcomes and mentoring relationships.
- **Group mentoring** is valued as a good strategy to support team-building and leadership skills, but also requires intentionally structuring large group activities and finding opportunities for one-on-one time with quieter participants.

Looking Ahead

Based on findings from PSA's first evaluation of the program, YMI expanded Cornerstone Mentoring to serve more high school youth. Similar to the middle school program, the high school expansion focuses on supporting youth as they transition from high school by exploring college and career opportunities. The expansion is part of YMI's My Brother's Keeper goal to create 5,000 mentoring opportunities for high school youth. NYC Opportunity is further evaluating this adaptation of the model with an implementation study anticipated for release in spring 2018.

Further Reading:

- [Evaluation of the DYCD YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program](#)
- [Evaluation of YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: Role in Supporting Engagement in School and Learning](#)
- [Evaluation of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: Strengthening the Mentoring Experience](#)