

Evaluation of the Cornerstone Mentoring High School Expansion

Positive findings for education and community engagement

Westat and Metis Associates' evaluation of the early implementation of the Cornerstone High School Mentoring Program identifies promising benefits for participants and highlights program delivery best practices. The evaluation draws upon site visits, interviews and focus groups with 60 mentees, 25 mentors, and 12 program staff, as well as analysis of program participant data.

In 2016, the City expanded Cornerstone Mentoring to serve high school age youth in addition to middle school youth. The expansion was based on positive findings from three prior evaluations of the program in middle school settings that found a correlation between hours of mentoring and improved school attendance, improved attitudes towards education, and confidence in their ability to succeed academically. Findings outlined in this report reinforce some of the previous evaluation outcomes, and show that mentoring strategies like these can help change youths' attitudes about education and relationships, and promote engagement with their communities.

Key Findings

Participants and staff reported that mentoring provided positive benefits to mentees:

- Increased engagement in school and a more serious focus on their professional futures and college attendance goals.
- Improved emotional well-being, as well as enhanced teamwork, conflict-resolution, communication and leadership skills.
- Greater community involvement through service activities.

What is Cornerstone Mentoring?

Launched in 2012, the Cornerstone Mentoring Program connects volunteer mentors to groups of three to four youth for weekly group mentoring throughout the school year. Mentoring activities include academic and career support, entrepreneurship activities and community service. Each year up to 62 program sites serve 744 middle school and high school age youth.

The program is a part of the NYC Young Men's Initiative, designed in partnership with Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). In its original form, the program focused on middle school students and was offered at Cornerstone community centers in New York City Housing Authority facilities. It was then expanded to include High School students and is now being piloted at additional DYCD afterschool programs throughout the 2018-19 school year.

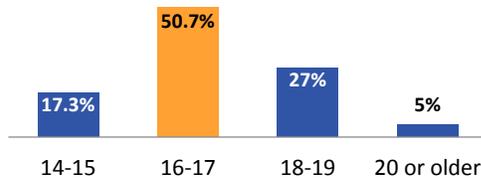
"...I feel like I've changed more as a person because, even when I go to school, the way I carry myself... [I] pay attention to the teacher and I participate a lot more because I'm more open... [I] raise my hand, answer every question, and my grades went up..."
— Mentee

Best practices for program success include:

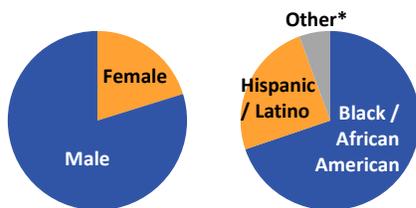
- Focusing on mentees' academic growth and college/career readiness.
- Recruiting mentors who can relate to mentees' experiences, to promote strong mentor-mentee relationships.

Characteristics of High School Program Participants (2016-17 School Year, n=341)

Participant Age



Participant Gender / Race



* Includes mentees who identified as Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, White or other

Additional Lessons

- Flexible programming that offers mentees choice in planning program activities can help engage mentees.
- Group trips – a favored activity by most mentees – could be used to incentivize attendance at weekly sessions.
- Mentor recruitment and retention can be enhanced by identifying potential mentors in the local community and offering more flexible time commitments.
- Staff and mentors would benefit from further training to develop skills to support mentees facing complex emotional challenges.
- Greater parent engagement would allow mentors to work alongside families to benefit the mentees.

Looking Ahead

In the 2018-19 school year, DYCD expanded the Cornerstone Mentoring program (now “DYCD Mentoring”) to provide mentoring at additional after school programs. While the overall number of program sites remains consistent, DYCD is piloting group mentoring at some sites within the Beacon, Compass NYC, and the Learn & Earn programs. DYCD Mentoring has taken lessons learned from evaluations of the program to better recruit and retain mentors and enhance technical assistance to provider staff and mentors. Through this and other initiatives, NYC Opportunity will continue to build evidence on the best practices and most effective strategies for providing meaningful mentoring experiences to NYC youth.

Further Reading:

- [Early Implementation of the Cornerstone High School Mentoring Program \(2018\)](#)
- [Evaluation of YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: Role in Supporting Engagement in School and Learning \(2018\)](#)
- [Evaluation of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: Strengthening the Mentoring Experience \(2018\)](#)
- [Evaluation of the DYCD YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program \(2014\)](#)