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Fixing Our Schools: Paving the Way to Mentorship

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The University of Akron

Fixing Our Schools
Paving the Way to Mentorship

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Honors Project

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Introduction

The problems facing American schools today are complex and vast. The numerous problems facing education has made the state of education “so entrenched it’s hard to know where to begin” (Foster and Nosol 10). This has created problems for teachers and reformers alike as they attempt to battle problems students face both at school and at home. Though there is no one-size-fits-all solution to education, the goal of this project is to examine one way that can create positive change within schools: mentorship. Through this research project I plan to examine types of mentorship programs, my personal experiences with mentorship, and the next steps for reformers.

First I am going to examine the research that already exists about American education and the existing research on mentorship programs. In order to clearly understand how this can be implemented in schools, it is first important to understand the types of mentoring programs that exist and their impact. By examining the two main types of mentoring, school-based and community-based, it will be easier to see how it can fit into American education.

Then I will examine mentoring programs that I have personal experience with. Where are these programs? What are they doing right? What are they doing wrong? In order to move forward, it is important to see the successes, failures, and opportunities for growth in programs that already exist, and in some situations thrive. Through looking at this it will become easier to see that this as a realistic way to enact educational change.

After this is examined I am going to look at how we are already paving the road to mentoring through the collaboration with Barberton High School. In this section I will use my own experience and the strong data evidence to examine how this is being implemented

successfully locally. This strong, no cost, and local collaboration is a great model for what these programs can look like.

Lastly, I will use this information to examine the next steps. There is strong evidence that mentorship has a significantly positive impact on students, but how do we implement these programs? What resources are available? What type of change can we see? It is my hope that at the end of this progress the path to mentorship will be clearer and seem like a more viable option for educational reform.

Part 1: The Problem

The state of American education has been in upheaval since the release of the 1966 *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, otherwise known as the Coleman Report. This report, done as a request by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had the mission of examining the opportunities for equal education by comparing minority groups and Caucasians (Coleman et al iii). This report was one of the first to show “the alarming extent to which students from low-income minority groups were falling behind their more fortunate counterparts” (Weber 3). It examined opportunities, the teachers, segregation, and access to supplies like textbooks (Coleman et al iii). This report showed some serious problems and fifty years later, many of these inequalities still exist.

These problems persisted years after the report. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Their outlook on the state of education was grim, stating: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (The National Commission on Excellence in Education). One of the main problems identified was a lack of high expectations when it

comes to our students. Many of these expectations, and the school culture as a whole begin in the classroom (The National Commission on Excellence in Education).

Even twenty years prior, the Coleman report acknowledged the importance and impact of a classroom environment by stating: “The school environment of a child consists of many elements, ranging from the desk he sits at to the child who sits next to him, and including the teacher who stands at the front of his class. A statistical survey can give only fragmentary evidence of this environment” (Coleman et al 17). It has been found time and time again that less-advantaged students have less access to materials and many face different treatment in the classroom.

However, these classroom environments have not changed for many students. In fact the book *America’s Unseen Kids*, published in 2008, *described* one of these environments that is all too common today. Kylene Beers describes a time when she, “spent some time observing in a large, inner-city high school. Too many students crowded into too-small classrooms that held too few books and offered too little support of any kind created a climate that was at best depressed and at worst oppressive” (Beers ix). These are buildings with security guards, with atmospheres that don’t allow students to leave their desks, and a climate that does not allow students to feel supported. Eight years after the publication of *America’s Unseen Kids* and fifty after the Coleman report this type of an environment continues to be a reality for many students who go to schools that believe they cannot handle anything else.

These kinds of environments and attitudes put our most vulnerable students further at risk. This attitude, in many cases, does much more harm than outside factors. Kylene Beers found this to be very true in her experience, claiming:

And there it was-- that declaration that those kids, *those* kids whose lives are limited not by their potential and not by their poverty, but by the interpretation of what that poverty means they can achieve, require an education that does not look like the education of children whose lives are lived in the security of abundance, or at least the security of enough (Beers xi).

This is an idea that has guided much of the decision making in today's schools. I've seen it dictate the materials, content, and discipline that has done nothing but stifle our most vulnerable children.

However, who are *those* children and what problems do they face? Even in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* tried to find an answer to this question. They identified the problems schools serving underprivileged children are facing in "these" schools. These schools "are routinely called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve" (The National Commission on Excellence in Education). These are not things that the classroom teacher can solve on their own, and is why we must call for more.

However, if we do not attempt to find a solution the United States will fall further and further behind. In education, the United States continually ranks behind the rest of the world. Even when we compare the top five percent of students, the United States ranks last (Weber 4). Some of this has been linked to socioeconomic status, as low socioeconomic status has an impact on academic achievement (American Psychological Association). This is a significant link seeing as the amount of families living in poverty continues to increase, with African Americans having the highest rate of poverty (Foster and Nosol 1). However these schools, and these students are

often invisible. Urban schools are largely labeled and stereotyped. I have seen it out in the community and amongst my education peers.

From this snapshot, it is obvious that the problems facing American schools and students are complex with no quick solution. It is out of the hands of individual teachers alone to close the gap between at-risk students and populations and their more well-off peers. Not even the superintendent or board of education can change the situations at home that can have an enormous impact on academic achievement. That is why we need outside help from programs that provide mentorship and support to students that they cannot get in a traditional educational model. As the United States is a country with a school system that has not had large improvement since the 1970s, it is imperative that we begin to think outside of the traditional box and find ways to make lasting change (Weber 15). However, in many places this change has already started through different kinds of mentoring programs.

What is mentorship and what can it do?

The dictionary defines a mentor as “a wise and trusted counselor and teacher” (Merriam-Webster). However, a good mentor becomes much more than that. Child Trends extends this definition claiming that mentoring “is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” (Lawman, Beltz, and Moore 1). This is a relationship that children typically get from their parents, but many children do not have a relationship like this at home. Child Trends estimated that twenty percent of children do not have a “caring adult in their lives” (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 1). This twenty percent represents 8.5 million children and youth that can benefit from some kind of mentorship, though children with

healthy home lives can benefit from some kind of mentoring as well (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 1).

Mentorship is something that can have an enormous impact on a student's life, as "High-quality mentoring relationships have promoted child health through improvements in academic performance, positive feelings of self-worth, perceived social acceptance, relationships with others, and decreases in high-risk behaviors like alcohol/tobacco use and violence" (Coller and Kuo 316). This system of support and accountability is something that has the potential to positively benefit the lives of countless amounts of children.

Child Trend's research review found that mentoring programs that focus on education, social skills, and relationships have had a much more positive and lasting effect than those that focus on behaviors, i.e. teen pregnancy (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 1). This same study also found that programs that specifically target at-risk youth have had larger impacts than those who do not (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 2). However, they found that programs that do not have this focus still have a good chance of making some kind of impact.

Historically, mentoring has been used through a community model rather than a school based one. However, school based mentoring programs are the fastest growing type of mentoring programs in the country (Coller and Kuo 317). Though these programs are gaining momentum, they are still new and there is not a large body of research behind them. In fact, most of the outcomes of school based mentoring programs are inferred from community based programs.

The current research on school based mentoring is conflicting. On the two different types of mentoring, Child Trend found, "both types can work, but community-based programs have positive impacts somewhat more consistently" (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 5). A lot of this may

be likely due to the fact that community-based mentoring programs have been in use much longer than school based. These community-based programs still have the power to make large outcomes in education. Of the programs studied, Child Trend found: “All of the four community-based programs that measured an educational outcome worked for at least one of those educational outcomes, whereas only four out of the eleven school-based programs that measured an educational outcome worked for at least one of those outcomes” (Lawner, Beltz, and Moore 5). While this is not conclusive, it is important to not discount community-based programs when finding ways to put mentors in schools.

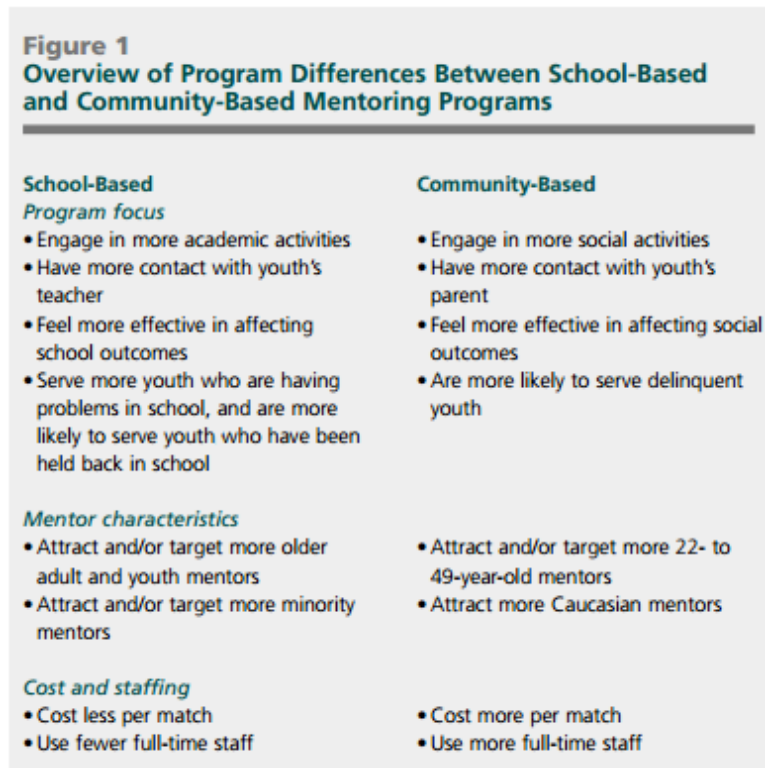
Even with this, there are many that argue that school-based mentorship (SBM) has less of an impact that community based mentorship (CBM). These arguments usually center around the fact that CBM programs have longer relationships and spend more hours a week with students (“Mentoring in Schools” 347). This does make some sense as more hours spent and a longer duration does lead to better outcomes. However, there are many things that SBM can do that CBM cannot. For example, one very unique aspect SBM programs is that they can help students improve their relationships with teachers and attitude towards schools (“Mentoring in Schools” 347). This is because these mentors have much more direct access to a child’s teachers than even parents do (“Mentoring in Schools 347). This article hypothesizes that because of this, these mentors can have more impact on a child having a positive relationship with teachers than parents.

Research has found that these outcomes listed above, especially improved student-teacher relationships, can create a large impact. The importance of student-teacher relationships can make a large difference in a child’s both motivation and academic achievement (“Mentoring in Schools” 348). It can also impact social skills with peers, leading to a much more successful time

in school (“Mentoring in Schools” 348). In fact, research has shown that SBM and CBM impact different areas of a child’s life. Asides from the more positive outlook about school, SBM focuses more on academic achievement, whereas CBM focuses on behavior. These both address different but equally vital areas of a student’s life. Because of this, it is important not to discount the impact of CBM when looking at how mentorship can help improve the lives of students both inside and out of the classroom (“Mentoring in Schools”).

Program Focuses: CBM and SBM

The report *Mentoring School-Age Children: Relationship Development in Community Based and School Based Programs* sponsored by the National Mentoring Partnership’s Public Policy Council compiled the following chart, comparing CBM and SBM in a variety of factors such as populations served, cost, and the mentors themselves:



(“Mentoring School-Aged Children 16).

The difference in program focus between SBM and CBM has been widely supported by research, CBM programs have been around longer and have historically been independent of schools. This shed light on the need for programs that can focus on more school-centric issues, paving the way for school-based mentoring. SBM has emerged both as a part of the need for educational reform and the expansion of mentorship as a whole (“Mentoring School-Aged Children” 16). However, it is important to realize that SBM does not focus on academic issues alone. Herrera et al found: “although youth and mentors in SB programs spend much less time in social activities, it is important to note that they do spend almost as much time as do CB matches talking about personal issues or problems, which is one component of social activities” (“Mentoring School-Aged Children” 15).

The chart below shows the large differences between SBM and CBM, one of the largest being the types of activities engaged in.

Table 1
Program Focus

	School-Based	Community-Based
Activities*** (Mentors who engage in “a lot” of...)		
Social activities	22.6%	59.3%
Academic activities	65.9%	39.9%
Job activities	7.7%	11.0%
Contact***		
Mentors who talk to mentee’s teacher “sometimes” or “pretty often”	67.8%	22.6%
Mentors who talk to mentee’s parent “sometimes” or “pretty often”	22.3%	84.7%
Academic Effectiveness* (Mentors who feel they have had an impact on their mentee’s...)		
Grades	74.5%	60.8%
Behavior/attitude toward school	85.0%	76.0%
School attendance	55.3%	44.6%
Social Effectiveness* (Mentors who feel they have had an impact on their mentee’s...)		
Social skills	77.6%	87.4%
Feelings about themselves	87.3%	94.3%
Family relationships	45.4%	66.1%
Showing concern for others	73.3%	83.5%
Communication skills	79.0%	88.4%
Youth		
is having trouble in school***	57.4%	41.3%
is a juvenile offender*	5.9%	10.4%
has been held back†	23.7%	17.5%

*** Difference is significant at p<.001.
* Difference is significant at p<.05.
† Difference is significant at p<.10.

Source: Mentor Survey

(“Mentoring School-Aged Children” 17).

While both kinds believe they have an impact on behavior/attitude toward school, grades, and school attendance, SBM does more to work towards these goals. As someone who has mentored in both a CBM and SBM setting I can attest that there is a much higher emphasis on social activities and development in these CBM programs. The differences in these programs impact how they can be implemented and the effects they can have in schools.

The Boys and Girls Club

I have personally been a volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club of the Western Reserve for over a year. Through volunteering my time at the Johnathan¹ Clubhouse, I spend approximately two hours a week mentoring children from first grade through twelve years old. The Boys and Girls club has a unique mission and focus states as: “Boys and Girls Clubs focus on programs to help youth achieve Academic Success, practice Good Character and Citizenship, and live Healthy Lifestyles” (“Programs”). Each individual clubhouse tailors their programming and focus to best serve the needs of the children they serve, as they recognize that all mentorship and youth programs are not one-size-fits all.

One thing that stands out in this Boys and Girls Club is that the volunteers, who serve in a mentor capacity, do not put in a large amount of hours. In fact, my commitment of two hours a week was average, with most volunteers at the clubhouse serving in one or two hour increments (Manning). However the full-time staff, a unique aspect of CBM, is consistently there with the children every day. The combination of the full-time staff and the multiple weekly volunteers creates a caring atmosphere that inspires children to achieve.

When I first met with my volunteer coordinator in October 2015, she expressed the importance of consistency as a volunteer. These kids come to depend on you. They know who the Wednesday volunteers are, they know when people come, and they pick their favorites. She

¹ Name Changed

told me, “you will have those kids who, for whatever reason, attach on to you” (Manning). This was something I found hard to believe before I started. How could these kids pick someone to latch onto? How much impact could someone who came in one day a week, or even less, as many volunteers would become busy with school, make an impact? I had seen the impact of SBM, but this was something that made me skeptical.

My first day there I was nervous. These were new kids, an age group I did not teach, in an organization I was frankly unfamiliar with. Walking into the building, I could see why so many children seemed happy to spend hours after school here. There was a computer lab, an art room, countless games, and meals provided. The building had a clear academic focus. A bulletin displayed good grades and report cards from the children and volunteers alike. A separate bulletin board had quotes about academic success from figures that were familiar to the students. One is a Swiss Beatz quote I have saved on my phone to this day and perfectly echoes their message: “Dorm room and a jail cell are the same size. You gotta pick which one you want”.

I entered the cafeteria where they were having Power Hour. For the first hour they were there after school they had to work on school work. Volunteers and staff circulated to help and they were expected to quietly do what they were supposed to do. I was surprised at the discipline in children as young as six. Most were at their tables silently, or at least quietly doing their work. In fact, everyone looked so focused that I was nervous that there would be no one to help. How was I, some random stranger, and adult to them, supposed to gain their trust?

This did not turn out to be the problem I thought it would be. Within a few moments of being in the room, kids were coming up to me seeking my help. It still astounds me how quick these children were to trust and try to form these relationships with adult figures, and it really began to show me the impact my two hours a week was making. Within a couple of weeks I had

a small group of children, mostly girls in the six to seven age group. They would shout my name when I came in, share their good grades at school, try to get me to help with fundraising for school, and drag me from room to room wherever they were going. Within a period of a couple weeks, I had formed relationships with these children. Their successes were my success, even though I only saw them for a short period of a week.

When looking at the two models of mentoring, Boys and Girls Club does not strictly follow the CBM model. Though they are a CBM, they have many aspects that are similar to SBM that I believe contributes to their success both locally and nationally. A large goal of the Boys and Girls Club when I first started was closing the gap. They did not view their program in a vacuum. Instead, they collected data from the students' schools, such as report cards, and used it to track progress. When I spoke to the club director, he identified this as their main concern for the time being (Ramsey). At the time I spoke with him, the data was concerning. The students were not progressing as fast as hoped, therefore they were trying to find more ways to improve the academic aspects of the clubhouse (Ramsey).

This commitment to success both in and out of the classroom has proven results. Ninety percent of Boys and Girls Club graduate high school ("Results"). In a country where the dropout rate is thirty-three percent and even higher at fifty percent for African Americans and Latinos, their main populations served, this is incredibly significant ("Results"). These children are also twenty-three percent more likely to go to college ("Results"). From these results, it is clear that this after-school program is doing something right, especially when it comes to the lives of students who are at-risk academically.

Like most CBMs, academics is not their main or only focus. In my first meeting as a volunteer the coordinator described the kinds of social programs they institute for the children.

Everyday after Power Hour they break into their age groups and do some kind of activity. These activities all have a lesson plan written by the staff member responsible for it (Manning).

Students learn how to use teamwork and other valuable skills that are important in the classroom and beyond. During these activities there is always high expectations for their behavior. If they are not behaving well or interacting in a respectful way with their peers, they are not allowed to participate.

As the children get older, there is more targeted instruction when it comes to behaviors. The Johnathan Clubhouse has a conference room that is typically used for their older members, usually ten and up. Here they will have meetings to talk to them about more adult topics. The volunteer coordinator expressed the importance of having these conversations, about drugs, violence, et cetera before they moved on to middle school and beyond (Manning). In all of these interactions, they made the members feel like they were valued as soon-to-be-adults who were responsible enough to hear about and withstand the pressures that might face them (Manning).

Through learning about the extensive programming they have in this regard, it was not hard to believe that their members are fifty-one percent less likely to do drugs, sixty-three percent less likely to become teen parents, and ninety-one percent of them are satisfied with their adult lives (“Results”). In neighborhoods where sixty percent of members said the clubhouse was the only place to go after-school, it is not hard to believe that fifty-seven percent believed that the Boys and Girls Club saved their life. (“Results”). This data shows how strong of a need there is for after-school programs like this. Programs like the Boys and Girls club serve as a way of bridging the gap between CBM and SBM by combining the aspects that make both types of programs indispensable and successful.

Planning to Achieve Collegiate Excellence

Another interesting type of hybrid mentorship program is one I have had the opportunity to coordinate through the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. This organization is a society for high achieving college students with at least a 3.4 GPA (“About NSCS”). As this group consists of students within the top twenty percent of college students nationally, there is a large emphasis of creating service and scholarship oriented programs (“About NSCS”). One of their hallmark programs, and a way to create leadership programs and community advocacy amongst college students is PACE, otherwise referred to as Planning to Achieve Collegiate Excellence.

PACE arose from the realization that one fifth of students were not graduating high school (“Programs Overview”). As many of the universities with NSCS chapters are around large school districts, for example the University of Akron and Akron Public Schools, they saw an opportunity to create lasting change. The goal of the program is for collegiate chapters to “create local programs with a school or organization; this partnership helps increase the likelihood that those students graduate from high school and are effectively prepared for college” (“Programs Overview”).

The first component of PACE is a mentoring/tutoring program (“Programs Overview”). This was the main component of my experience with this program. Traditionally, these mentoring and tutoring programs are aimed towards middle and high school students from underserved populations. Through meeting with these students on a frequent basis it is the goal to make them see that college is something achievable and accessible (“Programs Overview”).

When I first was inducted into the University of Akron chapter of NSCS, PACE was something that immediately interested me. As a future teacher the possibility of mentoring middle and high schoolers, the age group I planned on teaching, seemed like a valuable activity

and a way for me to decide whether or not teaching was something I actually wanted to do. Admittedly I joined this particular program as a way of seeing what I would get out of it, not realizing what the students would get out of this as well.

I remember the first day I was going to Dublin Community Learning Center², a middle and high school. I had forgot I was even going so I sprinted to the parking deck. I wasn't in Akron clothes and I even had a bow in my hair. I felt that I did not look like someone they were going to look up to or even relate to. In fact, I was very nervous. We were going to be mentoring at-risk eighth and ninth graders, at a school with a rough reputation. This was a situation that I was wholly unfamiliar with. I had come from a stereotypical suburban high school. There were few minorities and most of the students had more than enough to get by. Though I came from the lower-income side of the district, I still never wondered if I would have food on the table or if I would be able to buy school supplies. This was nothing like what many students in high poverty areas experience. I had come out of the highest performing district in my county with an excellent education, but I had grown up in a bubble. I did not know what these kids would be like. There are so many stereotypes that surround urban education that it is hard to know what to expect. However, I soon found that kids are kids no matter what kind of setting they are in.

When we pulled up to the school I saw a sprawling brand new building. Our small group of around six was ushered into the library where we were to meet a group of twenty-five eighth and ninth graders that were identified at-risk by the school counselors. These students had come to us with the label of "at-risk", at-risk for dropout, at-risk for failure, and most importantly at-risk for low expectations from those around them. As this was a program they were forced to be in, they were not exactly bouncing out of their seats in an eager attempt to get to know us.

² Name of school has been changed

We also faced another barrier. With two different grades, there was an age gap made even larger because of the divide between middle and high school. The middle school students were quick to slink away from the spotlight, and the high schoolers were not eager to welcome these younger students into their midst. This created some problems when we tried to introduce some ways to get to know each other. Some students flat out refused to participate and others were making fun of the whole process. I couldn't help but wonder what I had gotten myself into. How was I supposed to help them if they did not want any help?

Looking back, as a fresh out of high school honors student, I had many preconceived notions of how the whole experience was going to go, and those expectations were shattered. Once the officer in charge determined that the get to know you games were a bust we began to divvy the students up into smaller mentorship groups of either two to four students per college mentor. I was fortunate to have two freshman, so I avoided the roadblocks faced by those who had mentees in different grades.

To this day, I am not particularly sure what it was that made my two mentees "at-risk." They were both students who seemed to interact socially, had good grades and wanted to go to college. Deanna³ had dreams of becoming a lawyer and going to Harvard. She had even set up a college visit there for the summer, even though she was only a freshman. When asked what her goal was, she was very focused on finding a way to become a lawyer and she full-heartedly believed she would. However, she expressed she was not getting this support in school. She had transferred from a charter school in the area, and that had put her behind her public school peers due to the change in curriculum. She had conflicts with her teachers, not her peers, and expressed she was not feeling support and this was causing her grades to slip.

³ Name changed

My other student, Ryan⁴ had also moved from another school. The fact that both of my students had come to this school from somewhere else, helped me see the connection between high student mobility and poor academic achievement. He did not seem to be happy about his move. He had come from another local school that had a mentorship program all of its own. I had heard of this program and felt sad that he was not going to be able to experience this. He had dreams of becoming a physical therapist, but was also having conflicts not with his peers, but his teachers. He told me of one incident where a teacher gave him a zero on a test because he had come into class late. He had teachers like the ones described earlier, teachers who did not believe *these* students could handle any freedom and created a classroom environment very much like a prison.

However, like Deanna he had not let this adversity stop him. He was incredibly focused on achieving his dreams and had people to look up to. He was also fortunate to have a very strong role model at home. His older brother was a football player at a major university, and he spoke of him often. As a mentor focused on getting him to college, the fact that he had a sibling in college helped me feel that, to him, college may an attainable goal.

We were encouraged to get their phone numbers and follow them on social media, which arguably created a potential lack of boundaries. Because of this I felt a twinge of panic when I saw Ryan texted me a picture a couple days later. When I opened it I was pleasantly surprised. He had sent a picture of an invitation to a pre-medicine camp in the summer. Seeing this made me feel that somehow I had done something right and was happy to know that he was willing to share his successes with me so soon.

Unfortunately, the program began to disintegrate after just a couple of meetings. The officer in charge got caught up in nursing school, got engaged, and then promptly pulled back

⁴ Name changed

from club activities. The meetings slowly turned from every other week to never. I would get texts from my two mentees asking when we were going to meet next, but I did not have an answer. The school was frustrated as well, finding out that our officer in charge had lied to them about problems meeting on our end. Eventually, she resigned from her position, leaving us to pick up the pieces.

We finished out the semester, resigned to the fact that our partnership with this school was beyond repair. A few months later, after the winter break I was elected as the officer. I read the email and felt triumphant. Surely, I could find a school and start our program. Maybe, I could even find a way to keep us in this same school. Naively I wondered who could possibly say no to having a program like ours mentoring their at-risk students.

Initially we were easily able to repair the relationship with the school. I began emailing back and forth with the school counselor and she was going to let us come back, but there would be some changes. We would have to come during school hours and we would only be able to work with the eighth graders. For me, this was sad news as my mentees were both in ninth grade, but I was just happy to be in a school. With this new arrangement, we would surely make a difference this time around.

The first problem we faced was that she wanted us to come after the University of Akron's school year had ended. Though I was told three other members would be there, when I walked in that first May morning I found I was the only one there. Suddenly, I felt more like a babysitter than a mentor. With fifteen kids and one me, there was no opportunity to discuss successes, it was just a struggle to get people to stay awake and interested in what I had to say. We only had one more meeting like this.

I entered that summer discouraged, hoping that somehow the next year would be better. However, due to scheduling problems and a lack of responsiveness from the school I saw our partnership with their school disintegrate. I tried more options. One school said yes, a high-achieving STEM school. It did not fit the definition of “at-risk” but I was desperate to get us in a school. I knew that it was not just the stereotypically at-risk kids that had problems, but “when it comes to failing schools, it’s not just ‘those kids’ We’ve got a crisis at every income level and every type of school” (Weber 21).

This partnership was not everything I hoped it would be. Though we were able to organize a March to College Day, a component of the PACE program where we bring students to college for a day, the school was not flexible in working with us or what we were supposed to be doing to satisfy our national requirements (“Programs Overview”). My volunteers were going in and doing office work, not even seeing kids. The relationship went south when one of the volunteers told the school that I was looking for another arrangement, something I had yet to discuss with them.

After this, I met with three other schools, and they were not interested. The year waned on and my motivation faded. I moved on to a higher position, and a new, fresh officer came in to try to reinstate the program. Even with my help, they have been unsuccessful to this day. I can’t help but feel that, in this situation, we failed the kids. We came in promising new relationships and support and gave them nothing but a new disappointment. Deanna would be ending her junior year now, and I can’t help but wonder if she still plans to apply to Harvard.

As for Ryan, an interesting thing happened. A full year later I was doing mentoring through a class in a different school. I was walking down the hallway and saw a boy that looked familiar. At first I thought that this couldn’t possibly be the same student. Just last year he was at

another school, but then he approached me. He told me that he missed us coming in and he had been doing a lot better now that he was back at his old. This small interaction made me feel that what we had done was not entirely useless.

Ultimately, I do not feel programs like this one are a solution. A mentorship program purely run by college students with little adult support is not the most successful way to enact lasting change. With it came a sense of impermanence that was not good for either the mentors or the mentees. A sophomore in college is simply not equipped to run a mentoring program on the scale that is needed to create a large impact in both the students and the community.

However, this organization did offer a unique blend of services. We were not entirely CBM or SBM. We had the opportunity to bridge the gap between CBM and SBM programs through what we did. If it had been the ideal realization of the program we would have been mentoring, tutoring, having assemblies, and organizing college visits (“Programs Overview”). However, as an organization of only students this is hard to achieve. As an attendant at our national conference in Florida, it seemed there were few chapters that had found a solution to the same problem we faced.

Schools are also hesitant to let a lot of largely non-education major, students in and have access to their students. In my experience, aside from a background check, there was no vetting process to be a mentor so anyone who was a member of the organization could do this. There was no way to see if they had a passion for the cause or were going to stick around. Though we were a free service, a school was taking on a lot of risk by having us there.

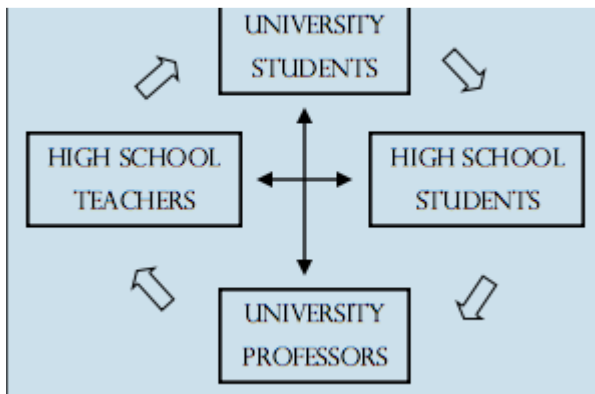
There was also the added problem of a lack of boundaries. We were encouraged by the school to add these students on social media, but with this comes a risk. To let students who were not vetted have this much access to their students’ lives seemed worrisome to me. This was a

problem that we encountered with other schools. One school said we were too close in age to mentor her middle school students. Another school was an alternative school, and was worried about putting mentors with students that might actually be older than them as their students went up to age twenty-one. Other schools just did not want to bother with the logistics. Even though we were free, there was not a lot of information or research to back us up. One letter from our national organization and my pleading was all we had to get into a school. This program is a great example of how good intentions are not always enough.

F.A.C.E: Fostering a Collaborative Education

The third and last mentoring program I have participated in is an excellent example of what SBM can achieve. Fostering a Collaborative Education, otherwise known as FACE is a program that I have anticipated since I took my first class with Dr. Harold Foster. Started around 1998, Harold Foster forged a collaborative partnership with a local high school. This collaboration has spanned three high schools and eighteen years of mentorship in schools.

F.A.C.E has three goals: “1. Create ‘strong’ teachers. 2. Create ‘strong’ high school students who are college ready. 3. Provide a ‘strong’ curriculum for both high school and college students” (Fostering a Collaborative Education). The goal is to provide this through on-site staff, student teachers as decision makers, long-term relationships, an advanced curriculum, and reflections (Fostering a Collaborative Education).



(Fostering a Collaborative Education).

These goals aligned with the model in the graph above. Through this sustained model, college students experience a more consistent placement, something that is very important in the lead up to student teaching (Deevers). The Barberton students benefit both socially and academically (Deevers).

In an evaluation by the Summit Education Initiative, improvement found strong evidence to suggest that F.A.C.E is continuing to make a strong impact on students. They found that “students in the partnership reported increased **academic press, academic support, peer connections, and sense of safety**” (Deevers). This was highly evident for me. As a participant in the F.A.C.E. in Barberton High School, it was expressed over and over to me that it was possible to teach at-risk students a rigorous curriculum. This culture of high expectations for both the pre-service teachers and high school students has set a tone of achievement as shown by the data.

These terms are largely gauged by viewing student attitudes, but the data goes further than that. When comparing the students in the UA project to students who were not, the Summit Education Initiative found that these students were “2 ½ times more likely to earn higher GPAs in the second quarter than other students” (Deevers). I saw that when I was there. It was amazing to see the change these students can make when they feel there is someone there to care about them and hold them accountable.

This project has come a long way since its beginnings, and continues to grow. When describing the beginning Harold Foster said:

my college class met at Galway, initially working with Sally’s students primarily as tutors. However, over the years the project grew to the point where my students took over the class completely; one or two of my students were always present in Sally’s Galway classroom and delivered a very carefully planned curriculum, one similar to those taught

in advanced English classrooms in the best high schools in the United States” (Foster xvi).

These students, one who had been labeled “at-risk” and unable to learn from this type of curriculum, rose to the challenge and shattered the stereotypes that others had set for them.

Not only has this program evolved to include a Social Studies classroom, but it also just received a grant to make the project even bigger. Dr. Brad Maguth, Dr. Harold Foster’s Social Studies counterpart won a \$75,000 dollar Community Connectors grant from the Ohio Department of Education (Sipe). This grant is part of the Ohio Community Connectors Statewide Initiative, a proposal from Governor John Kasich in order to bring organizations together to support and mentor students (Community Connectors).

This grant enables the University of Akron’s Lebron James Family Foundation College of Education, Barberton Local Schools, Raymond James Financial, and Johnson United Methodist Church to partner in providing mentorship to Barberton students (Sipe). The goal is for this grant money to enable them to impact up to one hundred Barberton tenth graders (Sipe). By partnering with other community organization, this will transcend the level of support offered by the existing program to something much more comprehensive.

Rather than the mentors exclusively serving in the school context, as I did when I helped take over a class, there will be outside, trained adult mentors. These mentors, paired with at-risk students, will serve in a more intensive manner. These mentors will focus on: “promoting goal setting, goal attainment, character building, resilience and academic growth among the high school students” (Sipe). Both mentors and students will be monitored monthly and there will be incentives for progress.

In light of this new grant, F.A.C.E is providing a set of comprehensive services that is unlike anything else that is out there. The lines between CBM and SBM are merged with this, allowing students to receive the benefits from both. Inside the classroom, these at-risk students will have the support of a team of college students that are setting the culture needed for achievement. Outside of the classroom they will have a community mentor to make sure these ideas stick and that they are continuing to strive to improve themselves and set goals.

A strong part of this program is the accountability that is built in from all sides. Unlike the PACE program detailed earlier there is someone checking for both the success of mentors and students every step of the way. As one of the college teachers, all lesson plans are approved and real teachers and potentially a university faculty member are always in the room. There are deadlines for everything that is done. Mentorship reports are required twice in the semester so the university faculty can see the progress that has been made with individual students.

With such a high adult-student ratio there are some students that become yours, much like the Boys and Girls Club. This strong support for teachers is essential as they face challenges like “the differences setting the college students apart from the high school students were easy to see: culture, age, generation” (Foster and Nosol 1). The strong support from all ends of the collaboration makes it easier to transcend these potential pitfalls more quickly.

As for the adult mentors, some of which may also be teachers, there is training. Dr. Brad Maguth now offers a youth mentorship course through the Lebron James Family Foundation College of Education, at the end of which one is eligible for an I Promise Youth Mentoring Certification (University of Akron). While, this is a different program than F.A.C.E. it shows the attempts the University of Akron and Dr. Maguth are making to create well-trained mentors to go out into the community. As some of the community mentors in F.A.C.E. are college students,

this offering shows the effort that the university is making in order to have only trained mentors working with Akron's youth. Each organization involved has leaders that are responsible for meeting monthly to assess progress (Sipe). This extensive vetting and monitoring makes it so not just anyone can waltz in and mentor these students. It also makes it so those who do make it through this do not enter into this mentoring relationship unsupported.

My Experience at Barberton

I first heard of F.A.C.E, called by many people the Barberton Project, when I was in the spring semester of my freshman year. I was taking a class called Fixing America's Schools, an honors humanities class taught by a Dr. Harold Foster. With the threat of choosing a major looming closer, I figured that this would course would give me a glimpse into the problems that were facing American education and could maybe help me decide if I really did want to be a teacher. When I registered, I had no idea the impact that one class would have on the course of my life.

One of the required books for this course was *America's Unseen Kids: Teaching English/Language Arts in Today's Forgotten High Schools*. I thought this was an odd book for a course of mostly engineers, but I found myself reading it cover to cover, rather than just the selected passages Dr. Foster had assigned. I was intrigued by this mentoring program and was eager to learn about it in class. This was something Dr. Foster picked up on and he invited me, and some other members of the class, to come see what a day at the Barberton Project was like.

My first impression of the Barberton Project was confusion. I walked into a room where students were running around in donkey heads and fairy wings, rehearsing for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I observed, not sure what it was I was supposed to be taking in. One

thing that did stand out to me was that, for the most part, the kids seemed happy. I left Barberton that day thinking that maybe this was something I could do.

Two years passed before I came to Barberton again. I had almost forgotten about the kids running around, enthusiastic about Shakespeare. I was nervous and terrified. I had never done anything but some brief tutoring before this point and now I was somehow going to teach a whole semester. I knew it was co-teaching, but it was a frightening prospect. The first day a friend and I pulled up to the new building and thought this was it. We were about to be *teachers*. The mentoring aspect had not even crossed my mind.

Soon we were divided into groups. I would be spending my semester with a group of five other students in a tenth grade class that operated on a block schedule. I was eager to experience this type of schedule I had never seen before. I saw on our syllabus that we would have to do mentoring reports twice during the semester. I remember wondering if I would really be able to make that kind of connection with a student before brushing it out of my mind completely as we had planning for three units to do.

The first day I was going to be in front of them I was a nervous wreck. I had to do a five minute book talk on a novel I had to convince them to read to join my group. I had spent the night before panicking, wondering if it was too late to change my book. On my way to the school, my phone died leaving me lost in the middle of an area I wasn't familiar with, thinking I should just turn my car around and call it quits. When I finally made it to the school, miraculously on time, I walked into a room of unfamiliar faces.

I looked out at them wondering how in a few months these kids could be the kids I saw at Barberton two years ago. After my talk I had a reading group of four students. When I first started I was nervous, probably way more scared of them than they were of me. I was afraid I

wouldn't connect with them, but I didn't have to worry about that. Two of them were featured in my mentoring reports and I was sad to see them all go when we moved on to the next unit. Being there every day and guiding them through reading, writing, and Shakespeare I built so many connections with students. In May when the spring semester's project came to a close I could not believe I had been so scared that first day.

Aiden's⁵ Story

Aiden was not an "easy" student in any sense of the word. When I first saw him I sat by his desk because I saw he was going to sleep through the bellwork. Being the over-eager new teacher I was, I did not hesitate to tell him to do his work and was surprised by the angry response. To be honest, I did not even know where to start with him, but there was something about him that made me determined to get him on my side.

It did not take long for me to realize that Aiden was all bark and no bite. With some persistence and a lot of different techniques I was able to start to make some progress with him. I was fortunate enough to be in a situation where there was a high enough teacher-student ration that I was able to give him the individualized attention that he clearly needed to thrive. I found that with him, it just took time and patience for him to be comfortable enough to drop his tough guy attitude.

It did not take long for me to realize that Aiden was a student that had a lot of potential. Like many at-risk students, he had been ushered through an education where he faced low-expectations. He was not used to being pushed by many people, so when he was pushed in his English class he just shut down. Motivation was his largest problem. I found that if he was motivated he would do his work both quickly and correctly. The majority of the battle was just getting him to that point where he would actually buckle down and do the work. I soon found,

⁵ Name changed

through mentoring him, that it was important to check in with him frequently. He was the type of kid where if he could find the opportunity to fall asleep or be off task he would. Thankfully, through the format of the F.A.C.E I was able to provide that frequent, solo support.

One other thing I found with Aiden is that he did not seem to receive a lot of encouragement. One day I was working with him on some test prep with some sample science questions so we could practice reading graphs. He was more engaged and active than I had ever seen him in my whole time there. Turns out, he really loved science. I took note of this and told him he did a good job. This little compliment, one I didn't even think of when I gave it, made a huge difference in his attitude. He even told the teacher that I said he did a good job later in the day. I've tried to keep this in mind, not only with Aiden but with other students as well.

A few weeks into the project, he really opened up to me about his family and his plans after graduation. I was surprised to find he had his life more planned out than I did at his age. He had plans on becoming a welder or plumber and then moving to the south where a lot of his family lives. Hearing this really helped me get a better picture of him and more confidence in him. With the right encouragement and support, I had no doubt that he was going to get where he wanted to go. As teachers and mentors, encouragement and support can make a world of difference in the life of a student. We don't know what their lives are like before they enter our classroom, but we are responsible for making them feel loved and valued for the fifty minutes or so we see them a day.

Cassie's Story

Cassie had always been my most difficult student. She was argumentative, surly, and prone to shut down if she didn't get her way. For most of the semester I did not think I was going to get through to her. She had avoided me for some reason, and she made me nervous because I

felt like nothing I did was working with her. She did not want any help with our writing unit and whenever it was offered she was sassy with me and would try to find ways to push my buttons. Her behavior was something that the majority of our group did not know how to deal with and had not encountered before. When we broke the class up into groups for Shakespeare she ended up in mine. I knew I had a rough road ahead. I was nervous about cracking her tough shell, but I was determined to find a way to connect with her.

At the beginning of our Shakespeare unit, she was eager to be off task. However, with less of an audience she did tone down a little. About a week into this she really opened up to me for the first time. She had come to school very dressed up one day. I told her she looked nice and asked her what the occasion was. She then told me that she had dressed up because she had decided to break up with her boyfriend later that day. Class had not yet started so I was eager to take this as my opportunity to talk to her. I offhandedly mentioned that I use the same strategy, and the floodgates opened. Cassie started spilling out the information about how horrible her relationship was. This was definitely one of the days where I felt more like a guidance counselor than a teacher, but with the mentorship format of F.A.C.E I had enough time and the resources to give her this support.

After this, Cassie was much more receptive to me. She gave me less pushback and it did not take as long to get her on task. For Cassie, these little victories felt more like triumphs. While I did not feel that she was as comfortable with me as the other students I had taught/mentored, she was slowly coming around. While Cassie is not an example of a student who goes above and beyond, she was a student who would work if she was calmly and repeatedly reminded to stay on task.

As the semester and our time with them wound down, two things happened that affirmed that in a small way I had gotten through to Cassie. The first of these happened on the day of the Shakespeare performance. All week Cassie told me she wasn't going to wear her costume, wasn't going to go on stage, and definitely would not sleep on the floor, like her character was supposed to. I spent a lot of the week trying to pep talk her and remind her that it was important for her to participate. This is going to sound very minuscule, but when she got down on the floor, I felt that there was at least some level of respect between us.

The second happened on our last day. As a culminating experience we brought the students to the University of Akron's campus. We took them on tours, ate pizza, and celebrated their accomplishments through the semester. Towards the end of the semester Cassie came up to me, hugged me, and asked for my email. This may sound little, but for me it was a huge moment in my mentorship of her. This was the confirmation that something had gone right.

As they left for the day, I doubted she'd ever email me. As happens to most teachers, you pour your heart into these kids and then hope they will go on to be successful even though it is unlikely you will see them again to know. A couple months went by and I hadn't heard from her, though I did not expect any of the students who asked for my email to actually contact me. My experience at Barberton was no longer at the forefront of my life and I was enjoying my summer with less classes and the ability to transform back into a college student again.

I was on vacation sitting at a small Thai restaurant with a friend when I decided to check my email. I was surprised to see, of all people, Cassie's name with the subject line "Hey" in my inbox (Anonymous student). The email was brief, "Hey how's it going sorry I been busy with work and helping with the family I hope everything is going good with u and everyone"

(Anonymous student). This was the last time I heard from her, but I have never deleted this email.

What's next?

We live in a country where the “high school graduation rate is lower than it was a generation ago and by most measures education outcomes have been stagnant” (Schwarz 120). The problems facing American education do not have an easy solution, but mentorship can be a part of this. Mentorship is a way that can bridge the gap between what happens in school and what happens at home.

The impact of what happens at home and these behaviors is something that cannot be changed in school alone. According to Eric Schwarz, children spend only twenty percent of their waking hours in school, and that the out-of school experiences of poor and wealthier children are even more different than their in-school experiences. If we're serious about closing the achievement gap.... We need to attack the time issue and find ways to make much better use of some of the eighty percent that is now largely wasted (Schwarz 106).

When students are receiving mentorship resources from inside and outside the classroom, we can begin to make better use of this time and find ways to close the gap. Programs like F.A.C.E are an effective and low-cost way to achieve this. While CBM and SBM are worthwhile and enact change on their own a combination of the two makes the most use of students times and helps bridge the gap between school and home.

A lot of the problems schools face when trying to implement reform is the cost. This is one of the problems with some CBM programs. As they do employ some staff, it is not cost free. Then when you look at programs that are completely staffed by collegiate volunteers, there is

less accountability. Programs like F.A.C.E avoid this problem. They are no cost, yet are affiliated with the University of Akron and other university organizations, creating the accountability that is needed to make sure our students receive nothing but the very best. F.A.C.E has also been able to receive grants from the state of Ohio. Grants and other types of funding has helped this organization grow and will continue to grow this mentoring program that should serve as a model for those looking at similar changes across the country.

We are living in a country where many of our most vulnerable students are still underserved. However this can be changed:

schools don't have to replicate for our students the isolation, violence, predation, and indifference to the individual.... Rather, they might be humane, respectful, cooperative, and nurturing dedicated to eliciting the best from all our children, to seeing and hearing all of them, to giving them a voice, to deepening the bonds between them and strengthening the community that they constitute (Probst 123).

Schools may only serve children for twenty percent of their time, but this time is crucial and teachers can't solve these problems alone. Programs that bridge the gap between SBM and CBM make it so we can make the best use of the time in the classroom and give students the supports they need outside as well. If a teacher affects eternity, a mentor can as well.

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