

Using a Student-Centered Evaluation to Create
A More Successful High School Mentor Program

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Action Research

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Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project's contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed toward serving students and schools. In other words, this is a snapshot or one indicator of my work at this stage of my career.

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a lot of attention given to mentoring. Mentoring is most commonly defined as a one-to-one relationship between an older person (mentor) and a younger one (mentee). The purpose of mentoring is to improve a child's chances for achieving his or her goals by linking to resources and support not otherwise available (Powell, 1997). Most research has shown that mentoring makes an educational difference in the lives of both the mentor and the mentee. As the benefits of mentoring become more apparent, schools are stepping up to provide mentoring programs for their students. According to Ann Ensinger, executive director of Mentoring Partnerships, school-sponsored mentoring is a "success-based strategy to help young people develop self-esteem and personal growth" (Bintrim, 2001, p. 2).

Mentoring can take many forms. Typically, the mentee sets the goals based on his or her interests. Mentoring can "focus on career goals, community service, cultural enrichment, common heritage, social skills, or talents such as art or sports" (Bintrim, 2001, p. 2). Mentoring programs, when carefully designed and well run, provide positive influences for younger people who may need a little extra attention or who don't have a good support system available to them. Children who have experienced trauma, such as the death of a family member, neglect or abuse, or who are lonely and uncomfortable in group situations, especially benefit from spending time with a mentor.

Given the benefits of mentoring, one of the biggest hurdles for most mentoring programs is finding enough mentors for the demand. This is one of the reasons schools have turned to peer mentoring programs. Peer mentoring programs match older youth with younger students in one-on-one or group relationships to provide guidance for the younger youth. Through these special relationships, peer mentors provide advice and support and serve as role models for younger people who need help. Challenges facing those being mentored include problems with schoolwork; social issues, such as not "fitting in" with a peer group; family problems or tension; and other typical difficulties of growing up. A peer mentor can also simply be someone for a younger student to hang out with.

Several years ago, when I was attempting to find adult mentors for students in my elementary school, I could not find an existing program in either my district or the county. So I created my own program, using high school students as mentors. The program has evolved into a high school class and, based on my own action research, has been successful and effective in meeting both the mentors' and mentees' needs. To date, this program has involved over 125 high school and 250 elementary school students.

When I began my internship at Happy High School (HHS), because of my previous experience, one of the first projects I became involved with was their Ignite Mentor Program. The Ignite Student to Student Mentoring Program was developed by Performance Dynamics, a professional leadership and mentoring company. Their program is designed to assist students and staff in building relationships and understanding with each other. Their main goal is to positively affect school climate.

This was the first year of the Ignite program at HHS. A program facilitator from Ignite teamed with an HHS administrator to run the program. The facilitator was primarily responsible for training and overseeing the program while the administrator was involved with the logistics, e.g., scheduling meeting times and rooms, giving information to staff and students, and talking to mentors if there was a problem. Together they were responsible for coordinating and communicating with each other and the mentors. The purpose of the program is for selected upperclassmen (mentors) to help incoming freshmen (mentees) with their transition to high school. The mentors were trained in advanced mentorship and leadership skills about once a month throughout the year, beginning with a training in the summer.

Once the mentors were trained on a monthly topic, such as goal setting, they, in turn, taught this subject to a group of freshman in a “homeroom” class. The mentors were also to make informal contact with individual freshmen students on a weekly basis. An executive team of six mentors came up with other activities throughout the year. Some extracurricular activities were planned for mentors and mentees to interact, such as attending a basketball game. Another activity, Movie Madness, was planned to reward freshmen who had achieved a GPA of 2.5 or above.

Thirty-seven mentors had been selected the previous spring. Fifteen mentors were actively meeting with students by the end of the year. By January, when I became involved with the program, over half of the mentors had either dropped out due to various personal reasons or been asked to leave the program based on a failure to meet the required standards. Ten mentors had started out on the executive team, but this number had dwindled to six by January. There was a lot of discouragement and frustration expressed by both staff and students around the program.

Area of Focus Statement

Happy High School is a small urban high school in a large urban school district with a student body of 614 students. The student body is moderately diverse: 67% of students are African-American, 13% Hispanic, 12% Caucasian, 5% Asian, and 3% American Indian. There are 211 freshmen of whom 99 are males and 112 are females. The junior and senior classes have 314 students with 155 males and 159 females. The attendance rate is 84% (compared to a state average of 91% and district average of 92%). The mobility rate is 15%. The drop-out rate is 6.3% (compared with 4.4% for the state and 9.8% for the district). About 73% of the population is on free or reduced lunch and 25% are identified for special education.

The purpose of this project was to complete a preliminary program evaluation of certain aspects of the Ignite Mentor Program at HHS and make recommendations that will help improve the program next year. One of the glaring factors that seemed to be affecting the program was the loss of so many mentors throughout the year. After discussion with the Ignite program facilitator and school administrator, I decided to focus my research on the mentor selection process. This area of focus statement satisfies my central tenets of action research in that it involves teaching and learning in an area that I will continue to

be involved with in my own practice, is something that is within my locus of control, is something I feel VERY passionate about, and is something I would like (and think I can) change or improve (Mills, 2000, p. 27).

Research Question

In order to create a more successful Ignite mentor program at HHS, what factors should be addressed in selecting and maintaining high quality mentors?

Literature Review

My goal in reviewing literature was to examine other mentor programs to determine what kinds of factors, specifically selection criteria and processes, lead to success. I began my search by looking at mentor program standards for selection criteria and screening. In reviewing information on school based mentoring programs, I found some Mentoring Program Standards, which were developed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools. They appeared to present an excellent guideline in directing my search and beginning an evaluation and review of the program at HHS.

(A) Standard 1: Mentoring programs should be designed with at least the following scope and purpose:

1. Program size is carefully defined;
2. Program expectations are clearly stated;
3. Available resources are secured and available; and
4. Program expectations and support are balanced;

(B) Standard 2: At least the following mentoring incentives, appropriate to the circumstances, should be used:

1. Peer support is provided to the mentor;
2. Release time is provided as appropriate to the circumstances; and
3. Financial support is provided as appropriate to the circumstances;

(C) Standard 3: Mentors should be prepared for the mentoring experience with at least the following:

1. Mentors understand program expectations; and
2. Mentors receive training as appropriate to their work; training (e.g. subject matter, coaching skills, technology, etc.);

(D) Standard 4: Strategies for mentor selection and matching should be designed and implemented including but not limited to the following:

1. Mentors selection criteria are designed;
2. An efficient and effective mentor selection process is operational; and
3. Formal and informal mentor/protégé matching strategies are utilized as appropriate to the circumstances; and

(E) Standard 5: At least the following information regarding the effectiveness of the mentoring experience should be collected, analyzed and evaluated:

1. Evaluation is designed to focus on criteria related to successful mentoring experiences; and
2. Protégés, mentors, and program administrators provide feedback on program effectiveness. (Missouri DESE, 2003, from their website.)

Much of the information I found on standards and guidelines seemed to apply more to adult mentors, but most of the following information is also applicable to peer mentors. The National Mentoring Partnership website (2005) lists the following as qualities of successful mentors: “have a sincere desire to be involved with a young person, respect young people, actively listen, empathize, see solutions and opportunities, and are flexible and open.” In their Quality Assurance Standards, they write: “It is important that your program develops and implements standardized screening processes for potential mentors including:

- Require written applications;
- Conduct reference checks, such as, employment record, character reference, child abuse registry, driving record and criminal record checks;
- Conduct face to face interviews; and
- Hold orientations.”

The Oregon Mentors website (2005) proposes: “All it takes to become a mentor is someone who is committed, responsible and a good listener.” In terms of the selection process, they advise potential mentors that, “You can expect to: complete an application and screening process that includes a written application including a questionnaire about interests, references (personal and/or professional), a background check (when appropriate to the type of program) and a personal interview.”

In an article on developing an operation manual for a mentoring program, Jerry Sherk (2003) proposes that: “Eligibility screening for youth mentors should include: an application process which must include a parental consent form, face to face interviews, reference checks of at least two personal non-related adults, and successful completion of pre-match training and orientation” (p. 8). I found similar criteria in a start-up toolkit by

Mark Fulop (2003) developed from A Guidebook for Program Development for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon.

Powell (1997) in a review of 29 mentoring projects found that the following factors were identified as important in selecting mentors (p. 29):

- academic achievement (24 percent);
- teacher/counselor recommendation (17 percent);
- expressed interest (17 percent);
- leadership qualities (14 percent);
- dependability (7 percent);
- course activity (3 percent);
- availability (3 percent).

In the conclusion of another review, Powell (1997) found that, “Effective mentoring programs require careful attention to several key issues:

1. screening, orienting and rewarding mentors
2. the youth/mentor ratio;
3. time commitment for mentors;
4. program costs;
5. race and gender matching;
6. program location (in or outside of school);
7. mentor also serving as a family advocate” (p. 68).

With this general review of selection and screening criteria and standards done, I began to look more specifically at peer mentoring programs. I was heartened to find a preponderance of information on mentoring programs both on the Internet and in various publications. My initial review on the web turned up a list of thirty-five programs in the category of “Elementary and Secondary Students Mentoring Other Students.” I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the various types of programs in many different states and types of schools. There is an abundance of creativity in meeting the unique needs of students around this country!

I narrowed my web search to a review of twelve successful programs listed under the category, “Students to Other Youth,” (Mentor Peer Resources, 2005) which more closely resembled the Ignite program at HHS. There was a wide range of selection criteria and processes. They ranged from “the only prerequisite to become a Student Mentor is his or her desire to help educate and empower their friends and peers to take control of their experiences” at i-SAFE America Youth Empowerment Mentoring Program in Carlsbad, California to “screening includes letters of recommendation from several sources and a panel interview” at Peers Assisting Student Success (PASS) in Conroe, Texas.

All of the programs had some kind of specific selection criteria with one of the most detailed methods utilized by Youth for Youth Partnership in New York City. These youth are selected on the basis of school referrals, interest, education, grades, and/or experience in mentoring or working with youth. High school counselors and teachers recommend “role model” students and references are required.

Another model program I found on the web was Healthy Teens 2000: A Teen Advocacy Program (2005) in which high school youth are trained as role models and mentors for younger youth. The selection criteria they used includes: good academics, teacher or other adult recommendations, a willingness to commit to a minimum of one year's participation, good verbal communication and listening skills, the ability to use and accept supervision, the ability to interact well in group situations, and the ability to attend all the training sessions. The selection process includes asking for recommendations from teachers after they are provided with information on the program, requiring interested students to attend an informational meeting, and interviewing all interested and recommended students. This program also emphasized the importance of incentives: mentors received a small honorarium and a certificate and letter documenting their participation.

One other important factor I found on a "Peer Helping Brochure and National Standards" website (Peer Resources Network, 2005) that I didn't see addressed elsewhere was the selection criteria should insure that the mentors represent the social composition of the community in which they will be working.

In reviewing all of this information, it seems important that 1) successful mentoring programs have high standards in selection criteria and process; 2) this information is clearly delineated; and 3) these standards are determined based on the objectives and needs of each particular school. I think it's important to also keep the Ignite Program's suggestion in mind, that there may need to be exceptions for the "diamond in the rough" student, who is "just waiting for the right opportunity and may shine as a mentor" (p. 7).

Review of the Ignite Program Selection Process

This literature review helped guide my review of the selection process for the Ignite Program at HHS and develop my evaluation instruments. I reviewed the selection process guidelines in the Ignite Staff Handbook about what SHOULD occur and then, talked to the program facilitator and administrator about what DID happen in selecting mentors at HHS in the spring of 2004. Overall, Ignite met the Missouri standards of designing selection criteria and using an efficient and effective selection process.

The Ignite Program was presented to the staff who gave student recommendations. The recommended students were asked to attend an informational meeting where they filled out applications if they were interested. Ignite recommends that the mentor team be a good representation of the student population in terms of ethnic mix, gender, and academic achievement. Attributes looked for include: strong communication skills, willingness to lead others, ability to manage a small group, responsibility, accountability, flexibility, commitment to trainings and meetings, caring, being a role model, and not being over-committed elsewhere.

Executive team applicants filled out a separate application. For executive team members, in addition to the above, qualities looked for include: ability to lead peers, comfortable in communication with teachers and administration, enthusiasm and desire to be part of the

program, good listening skills, ability to build up and motivate others, strong follow through, well respected, and possess skills and creativity necessary for a leadership role.

Due to the number of applicants and in order to successfully start the program, the applications were not actually “screened.” Everyone who applied was accepted into the program. All but two students who applied for the executive team were accepted.

Parents were kept informed through letters and asked to sign a permission form for their children to participate in the program. Mentors were asked to sign an acceptance form and a contract agreeing to attend all trainings and meetings with mentees, be a role model in and out of school, follow all school activity rules, maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA, honor confidentiality, and discuss any problems or concerns with an adult staff.

Data Collection and Sources

My research method involved qualitative data collection techniques. I began my research with the list of mentors, dividing them up by whether they were still involved, involved for most of the year, involved for part of the year, or not involved. This seemingly simple task proved to be rather difficult as the program facilitator and administrator had different mentor lists and neither was able to accurately determine which category the mentors fell into. I ended up gathering this information from an executive team mentor.

Next, I gathered information from ESAS on each student’s gender, race, GPA, attendance, and behavior referrals. My main source of data collection came through student surveys (attached in appendix). All students at HHS have a study hall period once a week. I determined which study hall each mentor was in and wrote a letter to those study hall teachers asking for their help in passing out the surveys (attached in appendix). I hand delivered the letter and surveys to each teacher (18) to introduce myself and verbally explain my project and what help I needed. I also told each teacher that I would pick up the surveys after the study hall.

Even though each teacher received these verbal and written directions, only about three quarters followed through. Some teachers gave out the surveys but did not require that the students fill them out before leaving class. Another problem I encountered was that several students do not go to study hall. Using this method, I collected only 13 surveys.

In order to collect more surveys, I called students out of class. Even though the surveys were confidential, I was able to determine most of the students who had not filled out the surveys by looking at the study halls where I had had a lack of success. I was able to get nine more surveys this way. In addition, ten students wanted to talk to me in more detail about their opinions and suggestions for improvements in the mentor program.

My last piece of data came from talking to ninth grade teachers. I sent them an e-mail (attached in appendix) to inform them about my project and give them questions to think about. Then, about a week later, I attended a teachers’ meeting to discuss their views on the first year of the program and ask for their suggestions for next year.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As I began to get feedback from the mentors through conversations and analyzing the surveys, it became apparent that the focus of my final report be on giving a voice to these students. Several mentors felt their concerns and suggestions had not been heard during the year. In order to respect their viewpoints, my own perspective shifted to a more student-centered program evaluation, resulting in different recommendations.

My initial categorization of mentors, dividing them up by whether they were still involved, involved for most of the year, involved for part of the year, or not involved, proved too unwieldy and unnecessary due to the numbers involved. Only three students seemed to fit in the “involved for most of the year” category and only five students in the “involved for part of the year” category. So, I decided to lump the categories together to form two groups, which I named, for the purpose of this research: “Involved,” the mentors who were still involved or involved most of the year and “Not involved,” the mentors who were involved for less than half the year or not involved at the end of the year. Eighteen students fell in the first category; nineteen in the second.

Most of my research on ESAS on each student’s GPA, attendance, and behavior referrals did not prove to be statistically significant in terms of differences between the two groups. I wanted to look at these three indicators because Ignite creates a baseline for freshmen using these three statistics. They use this data in evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Also, this data would help reflect whether the mentors were role models.

Ten of the eighteen “Involved” mentors maintained a GPA of 2.5 or higher (55%) while fourteen of the nineteen “Not Involved” did (74%). Exactly the same number of students in each category (7) had GPAs of 3.0 or higher.

Attendance is a big problem at this high school, which is reflected in the records of the mentors. Twelve of the students in the “Involved” group had 50 or fewer unexcused absences (67%) and two students had over 90. Ten of the students in the “Not involved” group had 50 or fewer absences (53%) and four had more than 90. Only one student in each category had fewer than 10 unexcused absences! I was shocked by these statistics as it seems that even one unexcused absence “in my day” was a BIG deal!

Three of the mentors in the “Involved” group had received a referral (for minor incidents) while five mentors in the “Not Involved” group had received one or two referrals.

The other two statistics I looked at, gender and race were significant in terms of whether the mentors represented the social composition of their high school. First, there were six boys in both the involved and not involved groups, representing 33% of the mentors. The student body is 48% male. Second, 82% of the mentors were African American (across both categories). Only 1 student in the “Involved” group was White. The “Not Involved” group contained 2 White, 1 Hispanic, and 1 Asian student. This represents 8%, 2%, and 2% of the mentors in both groups.

My next step was analyzing the data I collected from my two page student survey (see attached sample). I received twelve surveys from the “Involved” group and ten surveys from the “Not Involved” group for a total of twenty-two. In order to get a more accurate picture of the results, I further divided the “Involved” group, placing those students who were on the Executive Team (4 of 6 responded) in a separate group. Executive team members were the most involved and had somewhat different responsibilities, roles, and activities during the year.

In Section One of my survey, I asked the students to rate different aspects of their mentoring experience on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest. Below are the averages for each question:

Table 1

	Executive Team (4)	Involved (8)	Not Involved (10)
1. Overall mentoring experience	4	4.4	3.4
2. Mentor training in the summer	4	4	2.4
3. Mentor training during the year	3	4.3	3.3
4. Written training materials	4	4.3	3.8
5. Selection process for mentors	3	3.4	3.3
6. Communication with Mr. Logan	5	3.4	3.6
7. Communication with Jeannie	4	3.5	3.3
8. Access to help when needed	3.75	3.8	3.1
9. Working with the freshmen	3	4.1	4.3
10. Activities with the freshmen	4.25	4.4	4.4
11. Meetings during the year	4.25	3.9	3.1
12. Knowledge of executive team	5	3.7	3

In all but three categories, the “Not Involved” mentors rated their experience lower. They gave significantly lower ratings for Questions 1-3, 8, 11, and 12. These are areas dealing with training, getting help and support, and communication about the program. Interestingly, the “Not Involved” rated their experience working with or participating in activities with freshmen the same or higher than the other groups. Across all three categories, Questions 5-8 received the lowest ratings, reflecting communication issues.

In Section Two, I asked the students to answer some general questions about their overall mentoring experience. Following are the results:

Table 2

	Executive Team		Involved		Not Involved	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Enough help during the year?	4		7	1	6	4
2. Going to middle school?	3	1 N/A*	2	6 N/A*	4	6 N/A*
3. Did you form bond with mentees?	4		7	1	7	3
4. Change anything about program?	4		6	2	7	3
5. What did you like?	Activities; making a difference		Helping, getting to know freshmen		Helping, meeting new people	
6. What did you not like?	Not getting to see freshmen much		Communication, organization		Communication, organization	
7. How many trainings?	3 - All	All but 3 or 4	7 - All	1-All but 3 or 4	3-Some	See below**

* N/A means they did not go to the middle school. This question did not factor into my analysis. It was placed on the survey at the Ignite facilitator's request for her purposes.

**2 students did not answer; 3 were "not sure;" and 2 did not attend any trainings.

The items which are significant in Section Two include:

1. Almost all the students who felt they did not receive enough help or training were "Not Involved." Only one offered a solution, which was better communication.
2. Nearly all the students thought something should be changed about the program. The most common response, in all three categories, was improving communication. Another common response, named by students in all categories, was program organization. Other responses were: more training and support, more time with freshmen, and the selection process. These ideas for change are reflected in the students' responses to what they did not like about the program.
3. The same theme, in terms of liking the program, came up for all three categories.
4. The "Not Involved" students were not involved in the trainings!

Section Three contained ten questions related more specifically to the selection process. I will discuss each question in turn and note the findings that are important to this area,

1. How long were you a mentor? It is interesting that every student in all three categories responded that they had been a mentor all year. This does not reflect fact as

some of the students in the “Not Involved” group had not been involved in any trainings or even met with any freshmen. I think their answers reflect their **desire** to be involved.

2. Did you meet with the freshmen? How many times? The most common response in every group was 3 or 4 times. At least one student in every category said they had met with the freshmen 5 times or “every” time. Four students in the “Not Involved” group said they had met with freshmen, but did not give an answer to the number of times.

3. What motivated you to become a mentor? What was the reason you wanted to become a mentor? Every student said they either wanted to help people in some way or they remembered difficulty being a freshman and wanted to share their experience. As one student wrote, “I felt I had no one to talk to my freshman year, so I gave them someone.” Other responses included: being a role model, talking to and getting to know the freshmen, helping someone succeed, and providing support to someone struggling.

4. If you aren’t a mentor now, why not? It appeared to be difficult for students to answer this with complete honesty. Two of the “Not Involved” group wrote “conflict in school schedule,” two noted “no time,” two said it was due to “no communication,” and one responded with “general problems.”

5. If you had it to do over, would you be a mentor this year? All but one respondent said they would!

6. Do you want to be a mentor next year? A few students were either graduating or going to a different school, but again, all but one student said they wanted to be a mentor.

7. What do you think would be some good incentives for mentors next year? Only half (11) of the students answered this question. The most common response was “free stuff” such as food and pizza parties; tickets to games, dances, and movies; and gift certificates. Four students said offering a school credit for mentoring. Four students said basically “following through” on what was already in place, i.e., meeting with freshmen and training on a regular basis. One student noted that having a small office space or desk for the executive team would be an incentive and improvement.

8. What would help you become a better mentor? All four of the Executive Team group, three of the “Involved” group, and two of the “Not Involved” group thought more time and experience with the freshmen (mentees) would help. Two students each in the “Involved” and “Not Involved” groups wanted more training. Two students noted personal qualities, “patience” and “respect.” Two students in the “Not Involved” group said they needed to go to all the meetings, but they “never heard about the meetings.”

9. What other extracurricular activities were you involved in this year? Students in each category seemed to be involved in the same number and type of activities, particularly sports and acting. Being involved in other activities did not seem to affect their ability to be a mentor as most mentor activities were during school and students in the “Involved” group had more outside activities than students in the “Not Involved” group.

10. Is there a barrier for you in remaining a mentor? Only students in the “Not Involved” group answered this question. Their responses included inability to get out of class, lack of communication about meetings, and work schedules in the summer.

It is quite apparent from looking at all this data that the student mentors enjoyed and benefited from their mentoring experience. Their primary motivation was helping younger peers, knowing they had influenced or made a difference in someone’s life. This is a reflection of the culture at Happy High School. Students are very connected and look out for each other; in some ways, HHS is like one “big, happy – and dysfunctional – family.” The “dysfunction” is reflected in the poor communication in this program. This was the biggest problem and seemed to prevent mentors from doing their “job,” missing meetings, trainings, and activities with the freshmen. Everyone involved had the best intentions of communicating well, but just as with a family, intention is not enough.

It might be easy to blame the adults for the communication problems as they are “in charge.” However, they are invested in the program and busy with many other job demands. The school administrator is constantly bombarded with demands of a very challenging school environment. It might be easy to blame the student mentors as I heard often during my internship from teachers and other staff about students not taking responsibility. “If there is not someone constantly (daily) telling them what to do, students do not follow through.” However, many mentors do follow through. It might be easy to blame teachers as I often heard from students that they did not receive information about training meetings or meetings with freshmen. (Teachers are often given notices of meetings that they announce in class.) Teachers may not always have time or the inclination to read these notices. However, should they be responsible for ensuring students get this information?

The answer to this, as in any communication problem in a family, is that everyone needs to take ownership. If the Ignite Mentor Program is to continue at HHS, everyone involved – the student mentors, the teachers, the administrators – needs to take responsibility for making necessary changes to improve the program so that it runs efficiently and produces successful and positive results for everyone.

Before I continue with more specific recommendations, I will now relate the information I gathered from ninth grade teachers at one of their meetings. Ten teachers attended the meeting and all were familiar with my questions as I had e-mailed them a week earlier. Rather than talking about each question separately, I will summarize their views, concerns, and suggestions.

Overall, the teachers thought their freshmen students had benefited by receiving advice on high school life and being able to form friendships with upperclassmen. They thought the mentors were well trained and liked the topics they presented in class, which focused on academic success, attitude, encouraging others, and resisting peer pressure. They also liked the activities that involved all the students (Movie Madness and basketball games). Personally, the teachers liked having the chance to interact with older students.

One of the biggest problems the teachers noted was that there were not enough mentors to go to all the freshman classes. Two or three mentors went to one classroom leaving some classrooms without any mentors. Another problem they related was that there had been an advisory period at the beginning of the year, which was used for mentor activities. Once that period was dropped, the mentors seemed to have difficulty finding good times to go into classrooms. Finally, one teacher said the program appeared to “run out of steam” the second part of the year. Other teachers agreed.

In asking the teachers specifically about the selection process, they liked the fact that teachers nominated students. They thought the students felt “wanted” that way and that it “drew in” students who may not have otherwise considered being a mentor. Only the sophomore teachers had been asked to nominate last year. These teachers felt that every teacher should be asked for nominations. Further, they felt the program needed support year-round from ALL the teachers. They also liked the idea of filling in a “form letter” type of recommendation for nominated students.

Action Plan and Recommendations

Based on my own observations and research, informal student and staff interviews and written evaluations, I have several recommendations that program personnel should consider when planning for the future of the Ignite Mentor Program. Some themes emerged from this pilot program evaluation that will guide my recommendations.

First, as I noted above, everyone involved needs to take responsibility and ownership for the program. Any new program begins with administrative support, which this program has. However, support needs to filter down through the teaching staff and support staff to the parents and larger community. In taking responsibility and making a commitment to the success of the program, these adults are role modeling for the mentors, who in turn, will ideally better understand their role and ultimately, do an even better job of being role models to the freshmen mentees. Also, both adults and students need to remember to use their verbal communication and listening skills to ensure that everyone feels heard and acknowledged. This alone will lead to more ownership and teamwork.

Community support is an important ingredient. Ignite provides a paid staff person to help run the program at HHS. But, volunteers might also be recruited to help run the program. Support from people in the surrounding community may be required for the program to be a success. Respected parents or other adults, who want to support the school, may serve as an advisory or resource group to offer ideas and serve as a link to other community resources. For example, a group of successful alumni might speak to school staff about the importance of mentoring or to students to help with recruitment. Volunteers could also help raise funds and secure local donations to help provide for activities, such as free or discount tickets to movies, concerts, museums, or sports events, and other incentives, such as food for mentor meetings and trainings, mentor t-shirts, and an end-of-the-year celebration.

Mentor program staff, teachers and students all suggested that having a designated time for mentor training and activities would be helpful. If the school creates an advisory period again next year, this time would be ideal. Being able to receive a high school credit also appears to be a strong incentive for attracting quality mentors. Turning the program into a “leadership class” and making it part of a teacher’s “normal duties” would also be helpful, instead of making it an “extra duty” for an administrator. Perhaps other staff, administrators, counselors, and even, community members, could agree to meet with the mentors, on a monthly basis. These people could each be in charge of one week a month and provide lesson plans, answer questions, and offer tips on how best to show support and provide guidance to mentees. This would also prevent the problem of one person getting burnt out or “running out of steam” and eliminate some of the communication issues.

One of my most important findings was that mentors are very invested in wanting to be of service to the freshmen. A common response from students was that they wanted more time with their mentees. It appears that mentors would have found the program more beneficial if they had simply been able to meet with the freshmen more frequently. On the other hand, neither students nor teachers like students “being pulled out of class.” Having a separate advisory period would eliminate this problem. If this is not possible next year, perhaps they could have training on a rotating class schedule and meet with the freshmen once a week during lunch or their study hall.

One mentor suggested that the program “focus more on mentoring than the mentors.” He felt there were several mentors who were not invested in the program, which caused the focus to shift to their personal issues or ongoing program issues, instead of keeping the focus on the freshmen. His suggestion was to choose mentors who have skills “more related to what we’re trying to accomplish.” His example was strong social skills. This idea reflects concerns from both teachers and students.

As I noted above, teachers said there were not enough mentors for all the freshmen. Two or three mentors went to classrooms of fifteen to twenty students. If each mentor had been assigned to a classroom, they could have covered all the freshmen classrooms. However, the majority of mentors did not want to go to a classroom by themselves. In fact, several mentors noted that even two or three mentors per classroom were not enough. They related problems with classroom management, unwillingness of the freshmen to share in a large group, and a hesitancy on the part of some mentors to speak in front of a class. A few teachers also noted that some mentors seemed “too shy” to fully participate.

Ignite is a classroom-based mentor program. Even if all the mentors (37) had followed through, each one would have had four or five freshmen mentees. This number appears too large for many mentors to successfully handle, even though Ignite’s research shows this ratio is successful for high schools. A few mentors suggested a more manageable number is two or three. However, this year, even if the freshmen had been put into groups of three, twenty more mentors (57) would have been necessary. It is doubtful that such a large number of mentors can be recruited at this point in the program. Instead,

recruitment might focus on selecting students with good social and communication skills. As the program catches on and demonstrates effectiveness, larger numbers of mentors will want to be part of it, and the ratio of 3:1, suggested by students, can be achieved.

In terms of the selection process specifically, the Ignite Program offers an excellent system for recruitment and selection. Based on my research, this system is closely matched with other successful programs' criteria and processes, especially Healthy Teens 2000. My recommendation would be to closely follow the existing guidelines with a few minor adjustments.

Ignite suggests a long list of mentor attributes. All of these seem necessary for a strong mentor team, and as much as possible, each mentor should possess these qualities. Based on my evaluation, the most critical attributes needed are: strong communication skills, a willingness and ability to lead and manage a small group, responsibility, and a commitment to be involved in ALL trainings and meetings.

In order to recruit students with these qualities, four things might be added to the selection process: 1) ask all school staff for nominations; 2) ask all students for nominations; 3) e-mail teachers a "form" recommendation, detailing the required criteria, that they can fill out for interested students (each student should have two adult recommendations before they can be selected; recommendations could also be obtained from other adults in the students' lives); and 4) interview each candidate. The interviewing committee could consist of current executive team members, Ignite staff, interested teachers, and community representatives. Another recruitment possibility to keep in mind is asking a panel of respected community members to speak to the entire student body about the importance and impact of mentoring.

The primary element required for an effective mentoring program is commitment. To achieve the level of commitment and investment that is needed for a successful program, I recommend that the selected mentors follow Ignite's suggestion of "designing their own Mentor Code of Conduct." Involving the students this way should lead to more "buy-in" and peer pressure to uphold their own contract. Two or three mentors told me that other mentors chose not to attend meetings when they were announced in class. If each mentor signs a student-generated conduct contract, they are more likely to follow through. Also, mentors can remind others, when they are tempted to "skip," of this signed agreement.

A few mentors seemed to be angry that other mentors had failed to be role models and been asked to leave the program. In losing so many original mentors, they felt the program had suffered. They suggested solutions such as a stricter selection process (which has been addressed above) and more consequences for not following through. I cannot think of any effective "consequences." Perhaps if program coordinators check regularly with mentors to make sure that they are meeting their requirements and help those mentors needing more assistance, the need for any kind of consequences will be eliminated. If a volunteer from the community could take on the role of being a "mentor to the mentors," that would help in keeping all the mentors focused and involved.

In line with other programs' guidelines, the Ignite Program suggests that mentors be a good representation of the high school population. As I noted above, 67% of students are African-American, 12% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 3% American Indian. The mentors' ethnicity, respectively, is 82%, 8%, 2%, 2% and 0%. African-Americans are over-represented and Hispanics are under-represented on the mentor team. Also, only 33% of the mentors are male while the school's population is 48% male. These statistics should help guide recruitment strategies.

Ignite provides benefits or incentives for participation as a mentor. At an initial training, the program facilitator told the mentors they would receive community service hours, certificates of appreciation and recommendation letters. However, in this evaluation, none of the mentors mentioned any incentives they thought they were receiving. It would appear that they did not see these things as incentives. To the mentors, mentoring itself seemed to be intrinsically rewarding. Many mentors also seemed to feel that the strongest incentive would be changing the program into a class and offering credit. Providing some form of school and/or community recognition for mentors could further serve to increase interest, value and commitment.

One mentor suggested providing t-shirts, which mentors could wear on the days they are mentoring. This could serve as an incentive, as well as help with positive advertising and ongoing recruitment for the program. This same mentor proposed designing a brochure to use for recruitment, publicity and fundraising. Keeping the program in the "public eye," be it through a brochure, newsletter or other appropriate media, would help in maintaining a strong presence and producing positive results.

Finally, in the future, I would recommend more rigorous research and evaluation. Collecting data is going to be one of the most important aspects of the program as school staff ask questions such as, "What is the value of this program?" and "Is this worth our time and money?" Ignite requires ongoing data and evaluation. Evaluating both mentors and mentees at the beginning of the school year and then again at the end should help in assessing the progress made on program goals and establishing the value of the program. According to Ignite, it takes three years for a new program to succeed. I think this one will do just that, and not only be worth the time and money, but prove invaluable to the success of students at this high school.

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Evaluation for the Ignite Mentor Program
Happy High School
2004-05

Please take some time and do your best to respond to the following questions about your experience with the Ignite Program this year. You do not have to put your name on this evaluation. However, your answers are very important and will be used to improve the program next year.

Please respond even if you were not involved in this program the entire year. Just answer as many questions as you can.

Thank you for your time in helping to improve next year's program.

Section 1:

On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest (best), please rate your mentoring experience in the following areas:

	Good		OK		Bad
1. Overall mentoring experience	5	4	3	2	1
2. Mentor training in the summer	5	4	3	2	1
3. Mentor training throughout the year	5	4	3	2	1
4. Written training materials	5	4	3	2	1
5. The selection process for mentors	5	4	3	2	1
6. Communication with (administrator)	5	4	3	2	1
7. Communication with (Ignite staff)	5	4	3	2	1
8. Access to help when needed	5	4	3	2	1
9. Working with the freshmen	5	4	3	2	1
10. The activities you did with freshmen	5	4	3	2	1
11. The meetings you had during the year	5	4	3	2	1
12. Knowledge of an executive team	5	4	3	2	1

Section 2:

1. Did you feel that you were given enough help and training throughout the year? If not, what would have worked better?

2. Did you feel going over to the middle school was helpful?

3. What do you think about the set-up of your freshmen teams? Did you form a special bond with any one student?

4. Would you change anything about the program? What would improve it?
5. What did you like about being a mentor or about the program?
6. What did you not like about being a mentor or about the program?
7. How many trainings did you attend?

Section 3: (Selection process)

1. How long were you a mentor?
2. Did you meet with the freshmen? How many times?
3. What motivated you to be a mentor? What was the reason you wanted to become a mentor?
4. If you aren't a mentor now, why not? (examples: poor grades, other time commitments, conflict in school schedule)
5. If you had it to do over, would you be a mentor this year?
6. Do you want to be a mentor next year?
7. What do you think would be some good incentives for mentors?
8. What would help you become a better mentor?
9. What other extracurricular activities were you involved in this year?
10. Is there a barrier for you in remaining a mentor? (examples: training in the summer, timing of meetings with freshmen, inability to get out of class)

Letter to Study Hall Teachers

April 7, 2005

Dear Study Hall Teachers,

My name is Vicky Martin. I have been at Happy High School since the end of January working with (counseling supervisor) as a counseling intern from Portland State University. I have been an elementary school counselor for 14 years; being at Happy has afforded me a wonderful opportunity to learn about the differences at a high school.

I need your help in completing my internship project. A mentor program through IGNITE was initiated last spring with the selection of 37 juniors and seniors. My project involves an evaluation of the program, particularly the selection process. Hopefully, the results will lead to a stronger selection process and improved program for next year.

A very important part of my project is getting the students who were involved as mentors this year to fill out a two page evaluation. In talking to (supervisor), it appears that study hall may be the best time to ask the students to fill this out. The mentors in your study hall are listed below. Attached are copies of the evaluation. Please ask the students listed below to fill them out TODAY. I will come to your room at the end of study hall or the end of the lunch period to pick up the completed forms.

The evaluation instructions should be clear to the students. However, if you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. During the study hall period, I will be in Room A-44, leading a grief group. At other times, I can be reached through (supervisor).

I appreciate your help very much. Perhaps this request reminds you of your own internship and the projects that came along with it! I am really hoping that this project will contribute to the success of the IGNITE mentor program here at Happy High School.

Thanks again,

Vicky Martin

E-mail to Freshmen Teachers

April 14, 2005

Dear Teachers,

Hi. My name is Vicky Martin. I am a counseling intern with (counseling supervisor).

I need a few minutes of your time to help me complete my internship project. As you know, a mentor program through IGNITE was initiated last spring with the selection of 37 juniors and seniors. My project involves an evaluation of the program, particularly the selection process. Hopefully, the results of my project will help contribute to a stronger selection process and improved program for next year.

I will be speaking with you for a few minutes next Thursday during 4th period. I would welcome any feedback you have. To help you think about the program, I have listed some questions below.

Did you feel your freshmen students benefited from the mentor program this year? If so, what do you feel was the greatest benefit?

What did you think about the mentor activities?

What did you like about the program?

What did you not like about the program?

What would help improve the overall program next year?

How would you like to be involved with the process for selecting 2005-06 mentors?

In what ways could the selection process for mentors be improved for next year?

If you would like to respond to this e-mail, please do so. Otherwise, you could bring written comments to the meeting next week. Or, if you would prefer to give me verbal feedback at the meeting, I would also welcome that. All of your responses will be confidential.

Thanks so much for helping me complete this project successfully and for helping to strengthen the mentor program.

Vicky Martin