

## West Hartford Public School District

**Agenda Item:** Mentoring Program

**Meeting Date:** February 26, 2014

**From:** Dr. Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

**Through:** Dr. Karen List, Superintendent

### Background

The Mentor Program began as a partnership between West Hartford Chamber of Commerce (WHCC) and West Hartford Public Schools to fill a need for students to have positive role models in their lives. Today the joint venture continues to strengthen its premise by working closely with National and the State mentoring partnerships. The district's program is aligned with the **Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™** and boasts nearly 100 mentor/mentee relationships. Over the past decade, we have found mentoring helps students be connected, do well in school, improve their relationships with friends and family, make healthy choices and stay away from drugs and alcohol.

### West Hartford Public Schools Initiative

The Mentor Program's mission is to provide students the opportunity to reach their potential by offering guidance, encouragement and support through caring adult volunteers who have gone through a rigorous application and training process

The need for every student to have a positive role model in his or her life continues to grow. Each year, the West Hartford Public Schools Mentor Program actively promotes mentoring within all of the 17 schools, grades K through 12. The Mentor Program is school-based and runs concurrently with the district calendar. Each mentee meets with his or her mentor on school grounds. The sessions are weekly, flexible, taking place during the school day (including before and after school program hours) and are approximately one hour in length. Program Coordination takes place at both the district and school levels.

District Coordination is overseen by one staff member and includes community, business and school outreach, as well as overall marketing, recruitment, training, mentor screening, and program administration, monitoring and evaluation.

In each school, a staff member serves as the program's site coordinator and identifies students suited for the program and oversees the mentor/mentee relationships for the school calendar year. Typically, the site coordinator is a Social Worker, Curriculum Specialist or School Counselor.

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## District Statistics

105 mentor/mentee matches.

Average number of years for a mentor/mentee relationship is 4 years.

### Overall Matches by Level:

- Elementary
  - School breakdown as follows:

▪ Aiken	9
▪ Braeburn	3
▪ Bugbee	2
▪ Charter Oak	5
▪ Duffy	6
▪ Morley	6
▪ Norfeldt	8
▪ Smith	9
▪ Web Hill	3
▪ Whiting Lane	8
▪ Wolcott	<u>5</u>
Total	64
  - 97% of the matches at the elementary level continue through 5<sup>th</sup> grade
  - In addition to the district initiative at the school, Web Hill has had an “in-house” program for at least three years with staff acting as mentors.
- Middle
  - A total of 25 mentor/mentee matches
  - School breakdown as follows:

• Bristow	5
• King Philip	6
• Sedgwick	14
  - Most of the mentor/mentee relationships established in the elementary school continued through the early middle years.
  - As students approach the end of their middle school years, trends show there is less interest in participation in the Mentor Program. According to anecdotal information, students at this stage don’t necessarily see the need for mentor relationships beyond middle school
- High
  - The two high schools, as well as the alternative program participate in the district-wide program
  - A total of 16 mentor/mentee matches
  - School breakdown as follows:

• Conard	8
• Hall	5
• REACH	3
  - During high school, students’ schedules and priorities have become more demanding and often mentoring is given less focus.
  - The mentoring program staff encourages students to remain connected with their mentors by offering more flexible meeting arrangements.

## **Mentor Recruitment and Training**

The Mentor Program offers district-wide workshops (Mentoring 101) for new recruits twice a year. In addition, the program provides individualized school training and one-on-one sessions as needed. Despite varied marketing efforts, we struggle with finding new volunteers, specifically males, to join the program. The high retention and the recruitment efforts of our current mentors are due in part to the level of involvement of site coordinators and the district's commitment to provide ongoing communications, special recognition, and further education.

Two years ago we expanded the Mentor Program to include a Continuing Education component (Mentoring 201) to provide a forum for sharing experiences. We will continue to offer these sessions as a means of further enriching the mentoring relationships and to support transitions from elementary to middle to high school.

Three years ago, a Conard Global Problem Solving (GPS) project focused on matching high school students with middle school students to act as role models for a smoother transition to ninth grade. This initiative sparked an idea to incorporate peer mentoring as part of the district-wide program to offset the growing need for adult mentors. At the same time, peer mentoring would provide high school students the opportunity to gain leadership skills.

The peer mentor model was piloted at Norfeldt and Hall from 2010 through 2012. Last year the peer mentor program was formalized and adopted by the district with all schools participating.

## **Business Partnerships**

In October 2012, the WHPS Mentor Program and the Chamber of Commerce co-hosted ***Mentoring Matters in the Business Community*** to continue to raise awareness of the value of mentoring and its impact on our youth. The WHCC's Youth to Business Committee invited local businesses to an informal gathering to learn how an employer-sponsored, school-based mentoring program can be a sound business decision, offering a mutually beneficial opportunity. The Youth to Business Committee is comprised of Chamber members, including a representative of the WHPS Mentor Program.

About 10 businesses were represented and, of those professionals attending, five expressed an interest in either starting a company mentor program or becoming a mentor. Discovery meetings were held with Blum Shapiro, American Eagle Federal Credit Union, Wiremold/Legrand, Abbott Ball, and Farmington Bank, with plans to continue discussions in the upcoming school year.

## **Mentor Satisfactory Survey**

In June 2013, we surveyed our current mentors to learn more about their overall experiences and satisfaction with the program. The online survey consisted of five questions with a section for comments.

More than 50% of the mentors responded to the survey. The majority of the respondents have been mentoring for three to five years. Ninety percent believe they are well matched, have strong bonds and are making differences in their mentees' lives.

## **Looking Ahead ...**

As we look to grow the program next year, efforts will focus on:

- continued relationship with the Governor's Prevention Partnership
- collaboration with district administration
- incorporation of an evaluation performance model into the program

Dr. DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment and Carol Wilkas, District Coordinator for Mentoring Program will be available to answer questions.