

Friday, July 27, 2018

Dr. William E. Kirwan, Chair
Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Dr. Kirwan:

On behalf of Maryland MENTOR, I appreciate the work that you and the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education have done thus far. Your efforts to gather information and make recommendations to better link policy outcomes with school funding formulas will better allow our young people to succeed and to get on the path to leading happy, healthy and productive lives.

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce one additional consideration to Working Group 4: More Resources for At-risk Students – **the power of mentoring** – to strengthen all current recommendations made by this Commission thus far. Therefore, please allow this letter to serve as an official recommendation that, specifically, school-based and school-integrated mentoring programs be given special attention for addition to the already viable interventions as outlined by this Commission's work.

As one of 26 statewide/regional affiliate of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, Maryland MENTOR's mission is to improve the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships throughout Maryland and to close the mentoring gap. We provide leadership, resources, training and technical assistance to the close to 250 formal mentoring programs serving approximately 20,000 youth throughout Maryland. Maryland MENTOR works with schools, businesses, community and faith-based organizations to increase the number of young people with mentors, promote quality standards for mentoring, and to expand mentoring programming and opportunities.

These services are essential for local mentoring programs that work tirelessly to provide positive experiences to young people through providing them with quality mentors. The case for mentoring remains strong.

According to a recent study by the National Mentoring Partnership, it was found that young people who were at-risk for falling off track but had a mentor are:

- 55% more likely to enroll in college
- 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school
- 37% less likely to skip a class
- 130% more likely to hold leadership positions
- 81% more likely to participate in extracurricular activities
- 78% more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities
- 90% are interested in becoming a mentor
- 46% less likely than their peers to use illegal drugs
- 27% less likely to start drinking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists mentoring as one of four strategies that holds the most promise for youth violence prevention.

For many community-based organizations and programs, the “academic supports and extensive case management to address social, physical, mental and family needs to enable success at school” (Kirwan Commission Working Group 4 Draft Discussion Document, June 2018) is being carried out by utilizing mentoring as a cornerstone of their efforts. We also know there is broad-based community support for mentoring as well. Even though mentoring recruitment is often cited as one of the largest impediments to implementing effective mentoring programs, in the recently released (July 2018) Power of Relationships Study and Report by the National Mentoring Partnership we find that, “44% of Americans aren’t mentoring yet, but are willing to consider it” leading to the conclusion that there is, in fact, no mentor shortage at all.

There is also empirical evidence for the case to significantly expand funding and support for school-based and community-based mentoring programs and efforts. School-based mentoring (SBM) refers to mentoring relationships in which mentors meet with mentees on school grounds, either during or immediately after the school day. For financially constrained school districts, SBM has the potential to provide a cost-effective way to assist and support struggling students. School-integrated mentoring goes a step farther and embeds some type of daily class module/session with the group of mentees, usually facilitated by a staff person or community-based partner.

Community-based mentoring (CBM), or more traditional mentoring, consists of relationships that typically comprise of longer meetings between mentor and mentee and the participation in varied activities in different locations, not necessarily on school grounds. We believe in the merits of this type of mentoring, in addition to the variety of models and flexibility mentoring offers as a viable intervention, i.e. one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring, e-mentoring, peer or near-peer mentoring, team mentoring (many mentors to one youth), and any hybrids thereof.

In the study entitled, “Mentoring for At-Risk High School Students”, researchers from American Institutes for Research lay out a potential path forward for schools and districts to follow. Among the findings were increased attendance, decreased chronic absenteeism as well as improved behavior in school. Studies have even shown that by simply training administrators, educators and classroom aides on the ideal of “teaching utilizing a mentoring mindset” we can see outcome improvement even without formalized mentoring being present.

Consequently, and in light of this research, we make these specific requests:

1. Include additional consideration and weight in all future iterations of funding formulas for mentoring, either school-based or community-based
2. Leverage the expertise of Maryland MENTOR and our partners across the state to inform implementation of mentoring across the state as a recognized “additional resource” for at-risk student success
3. Commission at least three different studies of existing mentoring efforts across Maryland in schools with different profiles
4. Include “mentoring mindset” training for all current and incoming teachers as part of future onboarding and professional development efforts

5. Create individual, system/county specific Mentoring Offices to support mentoring efforts across the state going forward

In closing, we believe that there is a reason “nearly nine in 10 feel that mentoring is needed in our country—with more than eight in 10 supporting the use of government funds to grow mentoring opportunities, especially when charitable support is absent” (The Power of Relationships Report, National Mentoring Partnership, 2018). Mentoring, at its core, guarantees young people that there is someone who cares about them, assures them they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, and makes them feel like they matter. A meta-analysis of independent evaluations of mentoring programs showed that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on young people by improving their behavioral, social, emotional and academic outcomes simultaneously.

These are the outcomes the young people of Maryland deserve and we ask this Commission to continue to be thoughtful about their inclusion and implementation as part of future recommendations. Maryland MENTOR will continue advancing the availability and impact of mentoring as a proven youth development tool, resulting in positive outcomes for young people in Maryland and would be happy to serve as a resource for this Commission at any time. I can personally be reached at SAli@marylandmentor.net or via phone at 410.374.7692 x 105.

Yours in service,



Sadiq Ali
Executive Director, Maryland MENTOR