

Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

MARYLAND

One-on-one mentoring improves attendance, performance, behavior

Academic growth is just one measure of the success of the **Wicomico Mentoring Project**, a one-on-one, school-based program that started with 27 student-mentor pairs in 1994 and now has more than 700. Mentors provide role models and support for students in grades pre-K to 12, meeting with them weekly during the school day. The approach gets results—in 2010, for example, 41 percent of the participating students got better grades, 46 percent improved their attendance and 27 percent their behavior. In recent years, more than half the mentors have been NEA members—teachers or education support professionals in Wicomico County Public Schools—according to program coordinator Henrietta Parker, a union member herself. The union and the district have agreed to allow educators to use planning time to mentor students, reports David White, president of the Wicomico County Education Association. Many local social services agencies and civic, business, and faith-based groups are partners in the program. Wicomico County is a rural-turning-urban area, centered in Salisbury on Maryland's eastern shore between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

How it works

- Students are referred to the program by teachers, guidance counselors, and others for reasons such as poor attendance, minimum academic progress, at risk of dropping out, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, delinquent behavior, and life circumstances that limit parents' involvement in the academic and social aspects of the student's life.
- About 13 percent of the district's nearly 15,000 students have—or are eligible for—a mentor.
- The vast majority of students in the program come from low-income families—85 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price meals in 2010.

Documented success

- School data document improvements in participants' attendance, academic performance, and behavior.
- The program also obtains feedback from teachers, mentors, students, and parents via annual surveys.
- In 2010, three-quarters of the teachers who responded reported that they had observed personal growth, better work habits, and higher achievement in participating students. More than 90 percent of the mentors, students, and parents who responded to the survey indicated that they were highly satisfied with the program.

Administration

- The Wicomico Mentoring Project, part of the Wicomico County Board of Education's student and family services team, has a staff of three and a \$177,000 budget for the 2010-11 school year—\$248 per student.
- All 24 schools in the district participate in the mentoring program.
- More mentors are needed—about 800 students are on the waiting list.
- Half the participating students are male, half are female, 69 percent are African American, 27 percent are white, and 5 percent are Hispanic.
- Americorps was instrumental in creating the Wicomico Mentoring Project and helps sustain it.

Recognition

- America's Promise Alliance named Wicomico County one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People in 2010—the fourth time the county has received this recognition.
- The Wicomico Mentoring Project received the 2008 Leadership Award in Education from the Shore Leadership Alumni Association, the Herculean Award from the Maryland Mentoring Partnership, and a First Place Award of Excellence from the Office of the Attorney General's Spotlight on Prevention.

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Great Public Schools for Every Student