

Running head: MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Creating Effective Mentoring Relationships with Urban Youth

Renee S. Abbott

The College at Brockport, State University of New York

Acknowledgements

It only seems fitting that my first and last class in the Brockport Counselor Education program be with Dr. Summer Reiner. Dr. Reiner and the professors at Brockport, set the academic bar very high. With their high expectations, support, and understanding they truly do foster counselor excellence. I am incredibly proud of the accomplishments I have been able to achieve and credit these to this strong program. The Counselor Education program at Brockport is one of a kind and the journey has been an experience of a lifetime, thank you all.

None of this would have been possible without the support of Rob, Jr., Nicki, Spencer, and Kreg. I am an incredibly lucky woman to have a family that has been willing to work so hard and sacrifice so much to help me accomplish this. Thank you for all of your understanding and patients through all of my distractions as I pursued this degree. I love and appreciate you all, for your willingness to support me in every possible way. I am truly blessed.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
Creating Mentoring Relationships with Disengaged Youth.....	7
Review of Literature.....	12
Mentoring Program Options.....	13
Naturally Occurring Mentoring.....	14
Naturally Occurring Mentoring and Youth Resiliency.....	15
Naturally Occurring Mentoring and Academic Performance.....	15
Naturally Occurring Mentoring and Effectiveness.....	16
Structured Mentoring.....	17
Structured Mentoring and Youth Resiliency.....	18
Structured Mentoring and Academic Performance.....	19
Structured Mentoring and Mentoring and Effectiveness.....	20
Informal Mentoring.....	22
Informal Mentoring and Youth Resiliency.....	23
Informal Mentoring and Academic Performance.....	24
Informal Mentoring and Effectiveness.....	26

MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS	4
Mentoring and School Counselors.....	27
Summary.....	28
Research Questions.....	29
Methods.....	30
Setting.....	30
Participants.....	31
Intervention.....	31
Materials Used.....	32
Procedures.....	33
Data Collections.....	34
Data Analysis.....	34
Results.....	35
Frequency Analysis.....	35
Correlation.....	37
Discussion.....	39
Limitation.....	41
Implications for School Counselors.....	42

Recommendations for Future Research.....43

Conclusion.....44

References.....45

Appendix A – IRB Proposal.....53

Appendix B – Letter of Consent.....55

Appendix C – Survey.....57

Abstract

J. Skills and Practices

1. Applies relevant research findings to inform the practice of school counseling. Creating
Effective Mentoring Relationships with Disengaged Youth

Schools across the nation are concerned with student achievement and graduation rates. The U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) reported that, in 2009, the national on-time four-year graduation rate was 75.5% and the national dropout rate was 7% (Aud et al., 2012). In the *Public School District Total Cohort Graduation Rate and Enrollment Outcome Summary, 2010/2011 School Year*, the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2012) noted that a Western New York city school district (studied in this thesis) had a 45.5% on-time graduation rate. The summary noted that the city school district 2007 cohort had a 20.3% dropout rate (NYSED, 2012), which is far above the national average. Researchers attribute multiple risk factors, (i.e., Single parent homes, poverty, exposure to violent incidents) for school age children as having a negative impact on their ability to achieve academic success (DeSocio et al., 2007; Herrera, Baldwin, Kual & McMaken, 2011; Sanchez, Esparza & Colon, 2008).

Nationally, the percentage of school age children experiencing multiple risk factors has increased. The percentage of school age children living in single parent households has increased from 28% in 1990 to 33% in 2011 (Aud et al., 2012). In 2011, 65% of African American school age students were living in single parent homes (Aud et al., 2012). The percentage of school age children living in poverty also increased. It is estimated that 21% of school age children in 2011 lived below the poverty line (Aud et al., 2012). African American

school age children are disproportionately represented among this population with a rate of 37% living in poverty. Researchers estimate that 10% of low-income youth dropout of high school, which is twice the percentage of middle-income students that dropout (Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008). Nationally, during the 2009/2010 school year, 25% of urban schools reported more than 20 violent incidents occurring on school grounds. Researchers have speculated that the decline in academic performance and increasing dropout rates, among school age children, may be a result of the increase in risk factors that youth are experiencing in their lives (Furgus & Zimmerman, 2005).

The decision to dropout can have far reaching impact on the individual's future. Individuals who drop out have higher rates of unemployment, health problems, and incarceration (Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). According to the U.S. Census Bureau the average yearly income for a high school dropout was \$10,386 less than a graduate. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), high school dropouts are twice as likely as graduates to live in poverty, at an average of 30.8%. The U.S Department of Labor (2012) reports, that the current national unemployment is 8.1% and the unemployment rate for high school dropouts is 12%. Four years after dropping out, individuals reported lower rates of life satisfaction and have significantly higher rates of depression (Liem, Lustig & Dillon, 2009). High levels of poverty and unemployment among high school dropouts may contribute to feelings of life dissatisfaction.

Nationally, dropouts are a heavy burden on society. A substantial portion of the nation's tax revenue is allocated for supporting the people living in poverty (Tyler & Lofstom, 2009). It is difficult to predict the actual financial impact that a dropout will have on society but researchers estimate that a dropout will cost taxpayers \$292,000 over his/her lifespan. High school dropouts

have higher rates of incarceration. Researchers have found a correlation between student dropout and violent felonies (Ikomi, 2010). It is estimated that 68% of prison inmates dropped out of high school (Tyler & Lofstom, 2009). The need for effective dropout prevention programs is great.

Multiple factors school settings contribute to dropout rates. Researchers have found that poor academic achievement patterns start in kindergarten (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig & Heinrich, 2008). Students, who were poor performers in elementary school, are more likely to drop out later on, which suggests a need for early interventions. It is difficult to identify specific factors within a school setting that impact student retention rates. A study comparing schools with high dropout rates to schools with low dropout rates, found that school retention factors are interrelated (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007). The study indicated that student attendance was the strongest predictor of student dropout and that attendance was related to a students' perception of their school experience. Physical structural elements of the school, low student staff ratios, and non-academic interaction time with teachers, were all shown to effect student attendance rates, which are linked student retention. Schools that create a community atmosphere, where students feel cared about, listened to and understood, are more effective in retaining and graduating students (Christle et al., 2007; Knesting, 2008; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). Students who are connected to a mentor have reported feeling more connected to their community (Aronowitz, 2005; Gur & Miller, 2004), family (Gibson & Jefferson, 2006; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010), and school (DeSocio et al., 2007; Kolar & McBride, 2011; Sanchez, Esparza & Colon, 2008)

Multiple research studies have found that mentoring relationships, between adults and students, increase student academic performance (De Anda, 2001; Cavell, Elledge, Malcom & Faith, 2009; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Research also indicated that mentoring relationships assist in creating a positive school atmosphere (Knesting, 2008). This study explores the literature related to natural mentoring, structured mentoring and informal school-based mentoring. *Natural* mentoring arises out of social interactions that are not prearranged (DeJong, 2004; Little, Kearney, & Britner, 2010). *Structured* mentoring programs utilize highly prescribed and evidence-based methods to facilitate a relationship between the mentee and the mentor (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). *Informal* school-based mentoring programs combine elements from natural mentoring and structured mentoring (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur & Tarabulsky, 2010; Pryce, Silverthorn, Sanchez & DuBois 2010; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2009; Williams White, & Kelly, 2010).

This study explores the effectiveness of the Fo5 informal school-based mentoring program in creating mentoring relationships that increase student success. The data gathered in this study was used to answer the following research questions: Does a student's participation in an informal mentoring program increase positive behavioral characteristics influencing academic success? Do informal mentoring programs increase students' perceptions of supportive school atmospheres?

Setting the tone for a schools' climate and fostering student success is a significant part of the role of a school counselor (White & Kelly, 2011). Research has shown that school counselors can play an important role in the development, implementation, and oversight of school-based mentoring programs. The information gathered in this study can assist school

counselors in developing and advocating for the implementation of an informal school-based mentoring program in their district. The research findings of this study demonstrated that participation in the Fo5 program had a positive effect on student behaviors and created a perception of a supportive learning environment.

Some limitations to consider when reviewing the findings of this study include: the size of the participant sample may not accurately represent the student population of the urban school setting, the information collected in this survey was based on the students' perceptions of their experiences related to the Fo5 program and may not accurately reflect the actual level of participation, student behavioral change, and school environmental, students were allowed to sit with their peers to complete the survey and the results may have been influenced by a social desirability. The researcher created the survey utilized, in this research study, and the validity of the instrument has not been determined.

The school district's Internal Review Board (IRB) approved this study. Participation in this survey was not mandatory and no identifying information was requested. Students who may have had a negative experience with the Fo5 program were encouraged to seek support from their school counselor.

Review of the Literature

The identification of effective intervention strategies to address poor student performance and student dropout rates has been getting a great deal of attentions by researchers. Multiple studies have found that mentoring relationships, between adults and students, increase student academic performance, decrease student engagement in risk behaviors, and increase student retentions rates (De Anda, 2001; Cavell, Elledge, Malcom & Faith, 2009; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Studies have found that a youth, with a supportive relationship with at least one adult, increases the youth's ability to attain positive outcomes (De Anda, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2008).

Multiple research studies have found that creating mentoring relationships is an effective intervention strategy to prevent youth from disengaging from education (Strurtevant-Borden, 2010; Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009; Wheeler Keller & DuBois, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011). Mentoring has been noted as being an invaluable component of creating a positive school atmosphere (Knesting, 2008). In an analysis of data from multiple school-dropout prevention programs across the county, mentoring was found to be one of the five most effective elements (Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). Research has shown that school counselors can play an important role in the development, implementation, and oversight of school-based mentoring programs (White & Kelly, 2011).

School districts are concerned with balancing their budget and are hesitant to invest in student support services. The U.S. Department of Education report (Aud et al., 2012), on the condition of education, revealed school revenue has increased 74% within the 1988/1989 and 2008/2009 school years(Aud et al., 2012). Despite the increase, allocation for student support

programs continues to be limited. The 2012 report noted that there was a 46% increase in the total expenditures per student across the nation, which has been primarily allocated to school district debt repayment. School Boards face difficult decisions regarding funding allocation for student support services. School counselors can collect data to assist in determining the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies (White & Kelly, 2010). Positive results and the ability of a program to impact a large number of students must be considered when discussing the allocation of funds for a school-based mentoring program.

Mentoring Program Options

Specific mentoring program practices vary. There are presently two recognized categories of mentoring: natural and structured. *Natural* mentoring arises out of social interactions (i.e., neighbor, family friend, older friend) and relies on the relationship between the mentor and the mentee as the tool for change (DeJong, 2004; Little, Kearney, & Britner, 2010). *Structured* mentoring programs utilize highly prescribed and evidence-based methods to facilitate a relationship between the mentee and the mentor (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). A third category of mentoring is emerging, informal school-based mentoring programs. *Informal* school-based mentoring programs combine elements from natural mentoring (i.e., informal meetings, communication on mutual topics of interest) and structured mentoring (i.e., attendance monitoring, grade review, parent contact requirements, meeting frequency stipulation) to create another mentoring program alternative, that multiple studies have found to be effective (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur & Tarabulsky, 2010; Pryce, Silverthorn, Sanchez & DuBois 2010; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2009; Williams White, & Kelly, 2010).

The level of youth perception and engagement in the mentoring program remains the consistent variable across the mentoring programs that have been reviewed. The core of the debate seems to stem around the level of structure and mentor training that is needed to create an effective mentoring relationship.

Naturally occurring mentoring. The classic definition of mentor identifies a mentor as a more experienced guide, who provides wisdom and support to a mentee to assist them in transitioning to another level (Randolf & Johnson, 2008). Proponents of natural mentoring relationships support the idea that the tool, for fostering mentee growth, is the intensity of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee and minimizes the importance of structure and training of the mentor (De Anda, 2001, DeJong, 2004; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). De Anda (2001) stated that any mentoring relationship is better than no mentoring relationship at all, and places very little emphasis on the structure or training of the mentor as impacting the positive youth outcomes.

In naturally occurring mentoring relationships, a mentor is a more experienced individual who provides wisdom and support to a mentee to assist them to develop skills or transition to a new role (Randolf & Johnson, 2008). Natural mentoring relationships rely heavily on the intensity of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee to create positive changes for youth (De Anda, 2001, DeJong, 2004; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Naturally occurring mentors are non-familial positive role models, who interact with youth on a consistent basis to provide guidance and relational support (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Natural mentors can be neighbors, family friends or individuals that regularly interact with a youth and form a positive connection.

Naturally occurring mentoring and youth resiliency. The concept of youth resiliency is a youths' ability attain positive outcomes despite multiple life risk factors (Aronowitz, 2005). Natural mentors, who modeled positive decision-making and expressed belief in a positive future, counteracted the multiple risk factors and negative stereotypes the youth were experiencing. In a natural mentoring relationship, youth report that a mentors' positive outlook about their future is the most important factor that increased their ability to refrain from risk behaviors (Aronowitz, 2005). Natural mentoring and community programs that provide opportunities for youth to develop close caring relationships with an adult were found to increase internal risk protection factors (Charmaraman & Hall, 2011). The internal protective factors noted in this study included confidence and internal pride. The researchers concluded that youths' reported level of confidence, self-esteem, and internal pride had a positive correlation to youth positive outcome attainment.

Higher levels of self-esteem and general health ratings were reported in a six-year longitudinal study of natural mentored at-risk youth (Ahrens, DuBois, Loranzo & Richardson, 2010). Youth who reported at least one significant support mentoring relationship, had a significant decrease in suicidal ideation, incidence of sexually transmitted disease and engagement in violent activity (Ahren et al., 2010). The mentees in the study, reported feeling competent in their ability to set goals and develop plans to accomplish the identified goals. Research has indicated that youth can enhance their resiliency through naturally occurring mentoring relationships.

Naturally occurring mentoring and academic performance. Natural mentoring relationships have been found to have a positive effect on youth academic outcomes (Sanchez et

al., 2008). A study on naturally occurring mentoring relationships for youth with learning disabilities, found that mentoring had a significant impact on academic performance (Ahrens et al., 2010). Mentored youth with learning disabilities in this study were more likely to earn a diploma, attain employment and report increased levels of self-esteem (Ahrens et al., 2010). A study on the effects of natural mentors on youth in adolescents in foster care determined that there was a marginally significant improvement in academic outcomes compared to non-mentored foster care adolescents (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan & Lorenzo, 2008). An analysis of a school dropout prevention program, (Charamaraman & Hall, 2011) found that natural mentoring programs assisted a broad range of students at risk of academic failure. Close, caring relationships with mentors was identified as the most significant variable to reengage students at-risk of dropping out (Aronowitz. 2005; Charamaraman & Hall, 2011).

Naturally occurring mentoring and effectiveness. Natural mentoring relationships have the potential to last a substantial amount of time (Bernstein et al., 2009; DuBois & Silvershorn, 2005). The U.S. ED evaluated student-mentoring programs across the country and found that the average mentoring relationship is 5.8 months (Bernstein et al., 2009). The longevity of the mentoring relationships has been found to be a significant factor in the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Bernstein et al., 2009). In 2005, DuBois and Silverthorn studied the impact of natural mentoring relationships on positive adolescent outcomes. The study indicated that there was a significant correlation between the length of the mentoring relationship and the youth's perception of the intensity of the mentoring relationship.

A youth's positive perception of the closeness of the mentoring relationship has been to decrease the youths' engagement in risk behavior (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). The youth's

perception of the mentoring relationship is a significant factor in promoting change (DeJong, 2004). Youth who characterized their relationship with their mentor in close familial terms, such as, brother, sister, aunt or uncle, were noted to have increased positive outcomes from the mentoring experience (DeJong, 2004).

Structured mentoring. Structured mentoring programs in the U.S. date back to 1904, when a New York State (NYS) court clerk organized Big Brothers, a group of adults to mentor young boys who were involved in the court system (Big Brother Big Sister [BBBS], 2012). The Ladies of Charity organized, *Catholic Big Sisters*, around the same time to provide mentoring to young girls who were involved in NYS children's court (BBBS, 2012). The two groups merged in 1977 and currently have over 370 agencies across the U.S and 12 countries around the world. BBBS is currently the nation's largest volunteer supported structured mentoring network in the U.S. Structured mentoring programs provide training, supervision and prescribed mentoring activities for the participants to engage in, to increase the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Moodie & Fisher, 2009).

Many researchers firmly support the value of a more structured mentoring relationship to increase the positive impact on youth outcomes (Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2011; Moodie & Fisher, 2009). A study of school-based mentoring programs, found that mentoring programs that providing minimal structure and training to the mentors has no long term effects on at-risk-youth (Herrera, 2011) A lack of clear direction within school-based mentoring programs makes it difficult for mentees to form a productive lasting relationship. The mentors in unstructured school-based mentoring programs may only available for a short period of time. A mentoring

program manual provided by the National Mentoring Partnership, published in 2003, stated that untrained mentors in a program could have unintentional negative effects on the mentee.

Structured mentoring and youth resiliency. Studies have found structured mentoring programs, utilizing evidenced based intervention strategies, are more effective at fostering resilience in at-risk youth than non-structured programs (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Knowles & Parsons, 2009; Little et al., 2010). Little et al. (2010) examined a youth self-concept in relation to resiliency. At-risk youth participated in a three-week summer mentorship program. They completed a pre and post assessment, in which they rated their self-confidence in completing tasks that were difficult for them. The researchers found that the structured mentoring intervention increased youth self-confidence as a result of completing a task that was difficult for them. The National Mentoring Partnership (2003) maintained that mentoring is more than a friendly supportive relationship.

Trained mentors are more effective in fostering resilience in at-risk youth (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Fergus and Zimmerman found that risk exposure was a necessary part of increasing resilience in youth. Structured mentoring interventions have been related to successful task transferred to other areas and increased overall level of resiliency (Little et al., 2010). Youth who are able to overcome and accomplish one difficult task, are able to utilize those same skills to overcome other challenges. Structured mentoring relationships, in which mentors provide specific coping skill strategies to address risks, increased youth's positive outcomes and raised levels of resiliency (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Researchers have found that less structured mentoring programs are less effective in fostering resiliency development in youth (Knowles & Parsons, 2009). Structured mentoring

programs can provide structured activities for mentors and mentees to participate in to enhance the effectiveness of the relationship in developing resiliency (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). Student reported levels of self-confidence and self-esteem was correlated to the level of training, monitoring, and the facilitation that the mentoring programs coordinators provided (Knowles and Parsons, 2009). The study indicated that mentoring programs with higher levels of structure were more effective in increasing positive youth outcomes.

Researchers comparing the effectiveness of trained and untrained mentors working with aggressive youth found that trained mentors were more effective in decreasing aggressive behaviors of the youth (Cavell et al., 2009). Mentees who have participated in structured mentoring programs have been found to decrease engagement in risk-behaviors (Moodie & Fisher, 2009).

Structured mentoring and academic performance. Multiple studies have found that students who participate in school-based structured mentoring programs increase their attendance, make academic progress and decrease disciplinary issues during their participation in the program (DeSocio et al., 2007; Herrera et al., 2011; Knowels & Parsons, 2009). Structured mentoring programs typically focus their interventions in three areas: tutoring, youth advocacy and support (DeSocio et al., 2007). Structured mentoring practices can foster the youth's belief that they can succeed academically which creates an opportunity for the youth to make positive behavioral changes (Little et al., 2010).

Academic tutoring alone has not been found to significantly improve students' grade point averages long-term but tutoring has been found to facilitate the development of a mentoring relationship (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). School-based structured mentoring

programs that have a tutoring component have been found to be effective in improving student retention rates (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). The mentoring component of the tutoring has been found to reengage at-risk students in educational programs by changing the youths' perception of their ability to succeed rather than increasing their knowledge.

The trained mentors, who focused their interventions on increasing the student's exposure to new experiences, can increase the youths' confidence in their ability to attain their goals (BBBS, 2012). Mentor training in specific areas of interest, and the ability to participate in structured activities as a part of the mentoring relationship, has been found to increase the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. An analysis of an evidence based mentoring program, GirlPOWER, showed that prescribed activities can enhance the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Pryce et al., 2010). The structured activities provided by the GirlPOWER program increased the youth's exposure to positive role models and community supports that they could become involved in to assist them in attaining their goals. A five-year longitudinal study of a mentoring program, which provided exposure to post secondary educational options through campus visits, entrance requirement review and career exploration, found that the at-risk youth who participated were more future oriented and their test scores improved (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). Trained mentors can model effective decision making strategies that empower the mentee to make positive future oriented decisions (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Structured mentoring and effectiveness. Supporters of structural mentoring programs, believe that training can enhance the mentoring relationship and increase the relationships effectiveness (Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2008; Knowles & Parson, 2009; Little et al.,

2010; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Researchers examined the structure and training of mentors and the level of positive outcomes on aggressive at-risk youth who participated in the mentoring program. The youth in the study were randomly assigned to two groups. Group one, participated in a prime time structured mentoring program. Group two, participated a lunch buddy unstructured mentoring program. The students participating in the more structured mentoring program showed a higher level of positive behavioral outcomes and students reported more favorable perceptions of their mentoring experience. Trained mentors are more likely to develop goals and strategies for goal attainment with youth, which has found to be more effective than non-goal oriented mentoring relationships (Knowles & Parson, 2009).

Communication between the mentor and mentee can affect the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Barrowclough & White, 2011; Kaufman, 2010). In qualitative interviews researchers analyzed the correlation between the amount of boundary and communication training that the mentors had received and the mentee's perception of the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Barrowclough & White, 2011). The study concluded that the mentors who received communication and relational boundaries training were perceived as being more effective by the mentees. Mentors who participated in the qualitative study also reported higher levels of satisfaction with their mentoring relationship.

Mentees' may look to the mentor to support and guide them if they are facing difficult issues (Kaufman, 2010). Communication training can increase a mentor's ability to effectively communicate information and provide guidance for mentees (Kaufman, 2010). Mentors reported that it is difficult to talk to mentees about sexual and bullying issues. Mentors who received communication training reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate with

mentees. Effective communication strategies between mentors and mentees' can increase positive youth outcomes of a mentoring relationship (Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2011; Little et al., 2010).

Structured mentoring program costs. Structured mentoring programs can require a substantial amount of funding support by the community or school district (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). According to the BBBS annual financial report for 2010 the national operating budget for the mentoring program is roughly 25 million dollars. The operating budgets for individual community programs ranged from \$75,000 to 1.4 million dollars per year. Finger printing, background checks, recruitment and training account for much of a structured mentoring programs operating budget (North, Sherk & Strother, 2012). In a structured mentoring program each match can cost between \$400-\$2,000 to initiate and maintain for a year. A study, on the cost effectiveness of a BBBS mentoring program found that the long-term cost to the community to care for an at-risk-youth was far less to the operating cost for a BBBS for one year (Moodie & Fisher, 2009). According to the study, if the BBBS program was successful with only 1.3% of the at-risk-youth served, the program would break even. The level of training provided for mentors and the number of structured activities that the mentees and mentors can participate in varies from program to program. According to researchers, the greater the amount of training and activities provided by a mentoring program, the greater the operating cost (North et al., 2012).

Informal school-based mentoring. Informal school-based mentoring programs facilitate interactions between adults in the school and students to form effective relationships (White & Kelly, 2010). Proponents of informal school-based mentoring programs value both,

natural mentoring relationships and components of structured mentoring programs (Larose et al., 2010; Kaufman, 2010). A study identifying the effective elements of mentoring programs indicates that, the strength of the relationship is the most important element of any mentoring program (Larose et al., 2010). Researchers maintained that the mentee's perception of the mentoring relationship is also a key component contributing to youth positive outcomes (Legters & Balfanz, 2009; Little et al., 2010; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Informal school-based mentoring programs merge natural mentoring and structured mentoring together to create strong relationship and supportive school climates (Williams-White & Kelly, 2010).

Informal school-based mentoring programs outline general guidelines for mentors to follow, but rely heavily on the individual mentors skills to engage mentee's in supportive relationships to create positive youth outcomes (Larose et al., 2010; Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005). General guidelines may include; attendance and grade monitoring, meeting frequency and duration requirements, informal group meetings and parent and teacher communication (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Informal school-based mentoring and youth resiliency. In the fall of 2010 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released guidebook to enhance student connectedness. Student connectedness is the belief a student has that the adults and peers in the school building care about their learning as well as them as a person (CDC, 2009). The CDC reported school connectedness as a significant protective factor for youth against, substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual experience, and violence. The CDC recommendations combine natural mentoring with specific programmatic recommendations creating an informal mentoring school atmosphere to foster youth resilience.

Studies have found that informal school-based mentoring that combines structured elements of regular meeting times, attendance monitoring, and tutoring, with unstructured relational elements of natural mentoring increase positive student outcomes (Sinclair et al., 2005; Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007; Somers et al., 2009). A study of at-risk high school students participating in an informal school-based dropout prevention-mentoring program indicated a correlation between the level of protective factors of the youth and their participation (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). The mentoring relationships that developed, in the drop-prevention program increased students reported feelings of hope and optimism, which were noted in the study as protective factors. Students in the study reported feeling their mentor cared about them as the key factor encouraging them to make positive behavioral changes.

Informal school-based mentoring and academic performance. Informal mentoring programs implemented in a school setting have been shown to improve student attendance, decrease student behavioral issues, and increase student retention rates (Patterson et al., 2007; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2004). Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities have a high academic failure rate and school dropout (Sinclair et al., 2005). The “Check and Connect” school-based informal mentoring program for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities has been found to help students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (Sinclair et al., 2005). Students in the “Check and Connect” program were assigned randomly to school staff members as their informal mentor who monitored their grades, attendance, and suspensions as part of the “Check” intervention strategy. The “Connect” intervention strategy connected identified students to supportive individualized interventions focused on their check indicators. This informal school-based program facilitated a mentoring relationship between the identified school monitors. Students in this study had increased school

attendance rates, reported a higher level of connectedness to the school, and were noted to be less likely to drop out of school. Students participating in the “Check and Connect” program had a 9% dropout rate compared to students who the 30% dropout rate of the control group (Iver & Abele, 2001). A students’ level of connectedness was related to belief that adults in the school care about them, which increases their willingness to attend school on a regular basis (CDC, 2009). Students participating in school-based mentoring programs reported feeling that there is a personalization of their relationships with others in the building that holds them accountable for their attendance (Iver & Abele, 2011). It was estimated that one adult can effectively facilitate this personalization effect for 60 students by offering encouragement and checking in on a consistent basis with the youth.

Qualitative studies of student perceptions of their educational experience, identify positive supportive relationships with adults in the school setting as a significant factor in increasing a student’s ability to be academically successful (Laguana-Riordan et al., 2011; Barrowclough & White, 2011; Zenkov, Harmon & Lier, 2008). A qualitative study of alternative high school students, on their perceptions of what kept them from being successful in a regular high school setting, reported that regular education settings did not provide them with an opportunity to form close relationships with their teachers (Laguana-Riordan et al., 2011). The students noted that an alternative setting they created an opportunity to form informal mentoring relationships with their teachers that focused on developing their maturity and responsibility level (because of the amount of non-academic time together).

Informal school-based mentoring programs increase the amount of time school staff spend interacting with students outside the classroom (Patterson et al., 2007). Students and

school staff can have many negative assumptions about each other, which can create a barrier to creating supportive school atmosphere (Patterson et al., 2007). Researchers have speculated that when teachers spent more time with minority students outside of the classroom they decreased their negative assumptions related to the minority students and families. As a result, teachers reported forming stronger collaborative relationships with students and families as part of their experience. The collaborative relationship between students, families, and teachers increased the student's academic performance (Legters & Balfanz, 2009). Students, who spent time with teachers outside of regular academic instruction, reported feeling better understood and were less resistant to academic support (Laguana-Riodan et al., 2011). Students also reported a decrease in negative assumptions related to the teachers, as the teachers increased their level of collaboration, which created an unintended positive cyclical effect from non-academic interactions with teachers (Patterson et al., 2007).

Informal school-based mentoring and effectiveness. Research supports the significance of the mentee's perception of the mentoring relationship as a key component contributing to youth positive outcomes (Legters & Balfanz, 2009; Little et al., 2010; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). The U.S. ED evaluated student-mentoring programs across the country (Bernstein et al., 2009). The U.S. ED evaluation found that the average mentoring relationship is 5.8 months. The longevity of the mentoring relationships has been found to be a significant factor in the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Bernstein et al., 2009). Informal school-based mentoring programs typically last the duration of the students' attendance in a particular building (White & Kelly, 2010). A 2005 study indicated that there was a significant correlation between the length of the mentoring relationship and the youth's perception of the intensity of the

mentoring relationship (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). The youth's perception of the closeness of the mentoring relationship was also correlated to the degree of positive youth outcomes.

Informal school-based mentoring program costs. The estimated program costs for school-based mentoring programs vary. The amount of training for monitors, student incentive, additional personnel and number of activities that may be offered to the students and mentors as part of the program impact the amount of funding needed to support the program (Iver & Abele, 2011). The "Check and Connect" program, which is now operating in 27 states has estimated that the cost per student averages \$1,800 per year. The "Check and Connect" program utilizes additional staff to serve as monitors for the program, which may increase the operating cost. The National Mentoring Partnership estimated that school-based mentoring programs cost half as much as structured community mentoring programs (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006). Little information is available on the operating costs of other school-based mentoring programs. School counselors and administrators can collaborate to develop an operating budget to meet the individual school program needs (White & Kelly, 2010).

Mentoring and School Counselors

School counselors can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of school-based mentoring programs (Willians & Kelly, 2010). Program parameters such as; frequency and duration of mentor/mentee meetings, focus areas and home/school communication that are monitored by school counselors have been found to increase the effectiveness of informal school-based mentoring programs (Willians & Kelly, 2010). School counselor involvement can create a loose organizational structure and provided an overarching level of support for the mentors and mentees participating in the program. Informal school-based mentoring programs

can facilitate the development of a relationship for a youth with an adult in the building that they can seek support from (Somers et al., 2004). Studies have indicated that youth who report having supportive relationships with non-familial adults, increase their ability to have positive outcomes (Sanchez et al., 2008).

Summary

Schools across the nation are concerned with student achievement and graduation rates. The U.S. ED reported that in 2009 the national on time four-year graduation rate was 75.5% and the national dropout rate was 7% (Aud et al., 2012). Researchers attribute multiple risk-factors for school age children as having a negative impact on their ability to achieve academic success (DeSocio et al., 2007; Herrera et al., 2011; Sanchez, Esparza & Colon, 2008). Nationally, the percentage of school age children experiencing multiple risk factors has increased (Aud et al., 2012).

The identification of effective intervention strategies to address poor student performance and high-risk behavior engagement has been getting a great deal of attention by researchers. Multiple studies have found that mentoring relationships, between adults and students, increase academic performance and decrease student engagement in risk behaviors (De Anda, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Studies have found that, a youth having a supportive relationship with one adult increases the youths' ability to attain positive outcomes (De Anda, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2008). Mentoring practices vary in the level of structure and mentor training that is needed to create an effective mentoring relationship.

Proponents of natural mentoring relationships maintain that the tool for fostering growth for the mentee is the intensity of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee and minimizes the importance of structure and training of the mentor (De Anda, 2001, DeJong, 2004; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Other researchers firmly support the value of a more structured mentoring relationship to increase the positive impact on the mentee (Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2011; Moodie & Fisher, 2009). Informal school-based mentoring programs value both, natural mentoring relationships and components of structured mentoring programs (Larose et al., 2010; Kaufman, 2010).

Research Questions

Does a student's participation in an informal mentoring program increase positive behavioral characteristics influencing academic success? Do informal mentoring programs increase students' perceptions of supportive school atmospheres?

Methods

The study was a quantitative analysis of students' perceptions of their experience in an informal school-based mentoring program called, the "Family of Five" (Fo5). This study was designed to analyze the effectiveness of informal school-based mentoring programs in creating a mentoring relationship that influences student academic success.

The researcher developed a 15 - item survey to identify the relationships between the level of engagement in an informal mentoring program to the students' perceptions of supportive school atmosphere and the students' perceptions of his/herself as a student. The 15 items were designed to gather students' perceptions in three major areas: their level of involvement in the Fo5 program, behavioral characteristics that have been noted to influence student academic success (Larose et al., 2010, Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurow, 2005), and school environment factors that have been identified to influence student success (Christle et al., 2007; Knesting, 2008; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009).

Setting

This study was conducted in a secondary educational setting in an urban school district in Western New York. The school chosen for this study served approximately 1,200 youths grades 9 thru 12 who were significantly behind in attainment of credits towards graduation or were previously registered in schools that were phased out (53%). The alternative program offered, Saturday school, flexible 12 hour school day scheduling, three meals per day for all students and 1:100 student to support staff ratio. The demographic makeup of the district was as follows: 64% African American, 22% Hispanic, 11% Caucasian, and 3% Asian/Native American, East Indian, Other. The urban district had one of the highest rates of students living at or below the

poverty line in New York State. The urban school district in this study had a 48% graduation rate and was facing a 50.2 million dollar budget gap for the 2012/2013 school year. They were experimenting with creative intervention strategies, like Fo5, to foster student success.

Participants

This study utilized a convenience sample. All students enrolled in the studied school were required to earn physical education credits each semester. The survey for this study was administered during three physical education class periods. A total of six classes participated in the survey. The demographic makeup of the participants of this survey was representative of the overall demographic makeup for the district. Participants of this study were the students in attendance for those classes on the date that the survey was administered. The students in the physical education classes were multi-grade (9-12), and co-ed. One hundred and seventy four students were listed on the combined attendance roster for the six classes; only 98 students, however, attended the classes the day the survey was administered. Of the 98 possible participants, 87 students completed the Fo5 survey for an 88.7% response rate. Although the participation rate for this study was high, a power analysis revealed that the size of the potential participant sample was not large enough to accurately represent the student population of this urban school setting.

Intervention

The program noted in this research study was called the “Family of Five” (Fo5). The Fo5 program, matched five or more students to one adult in an urban school setting to create a “Family”. The adults could request specific students, and students could request specific adults

in the building to be in their family. If either party made no request, the students were randomly assigned to an adult mentor. Mentors were given no training and were provided minimal parameters for their interactions with the mentees. The mentors were asked to meet informally with the students in their Fo5 to develop a supportive relationship within the family. Mentors were asked to monitor the students' attendance, behavior and grades. Mentors were also asked to make connections with the student's parent/guardian. Family members were encouraged to engage in supportive communication to support personal and academic growth.

The Fo5 was developed under the assumption that, if a student perceives that they are valued and cared about in an academic setting, they will improve academically. This study examined the relationship between students' perceived level of participation and engagement in the Fo5 program, the students' perceived level of connection to the school, and the students' perceived levels of positive behavioral outcomes related to academic success.

Materials Used

The survey consisted of 15 statements relating to the participants' perception of their experience as part of the Fo5 program (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to respond to each statement using a four-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Statements 1, 2, 3, 5, and 12, were designed by the researcher to gather the participants' perceptions on their level of engagement in the Fo5 program. Research has indicated that students' perception of the mentoring relationship is correlated to student outcomes (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

The behavioral outcome items for this study were survey statements: 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The researcher designed the behavioral outcome items to evaluate the students' perceptions of behavioral characteristics that have been noted to influence student academic success (Larose et al., 2010, Patterson, Hale & Stessman, 2007; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurow, 2005). The environmental factors were addressed through items: 10, 11, 13, and 14. The researcher designed the environmental statements to evaluate the student's perceptions of the school environment. A supportive school environment, where students feel cared about, listened to and understood, has been shown to influence student academic success (Christle et al., 2007; Knesting, 2008; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). The survey utilized in this study collected no demographic identifying data regarding the participants. This instrument has not been utilized in any previous research study and therefore there is no existing validity data available for this survey.

Procedures

The researcher attended school counseling and administrative staff meetings at the urban secondary school setting during this study. A brief description of the Fo5 program was discussed during the initial meeting. The Fo5 program had been previously implemented in another secondary school in the same district, but it was phased out in that same school during the 2011/2012 school year. Administrators, who previously implemented Fo5 in other buildings within the district, requested that data be collected to determine the effectiveness of the program. This researcher created a draft student survey, which incorporated the key elements related to student success noted in the literature review. Administrators identified areas of interest for the survey as: attendance, parental involvement, supportive school climate and positive outlook.

The final draft of the survey was submitted to the district for IRB review and approval. A consent form (see Appendix B) was created and submitted for district IRB review and approval. The participants' completion and submission of the survey was determined as the participants consent to take part in this survey.

Data Collection

This study was administered during three physical education class periods. A total of six classes participated in the survey. The researcher eliminated first and last block classes from this study due to a reported history of poor attendance. Students changed their clothes for their class, and then gathered on the side bleachers for attendance. Students were introduced to the researcher and informed that they would be given the opportunity to participate in a brief 15 - item survey. The researcher explained the participants' rights form and the instructions for the survey, which were passed out by the class instructor. The researcher encouraged the students to provide feedback regarding their experiences as part of the Fo5 program. Students then completed the survey within three to five minutes. Students returned the survey to the instructor. The researcher gathered the completed surveys, thanked the participants, and left the gymnasium.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS, a statistical analysis program, the researcher manually entered the student survey responses. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using the data gathered from the survey. Correlational analyses were completed to determine the impact Fo5 had on students' perceptions.

Results

The data gathered in this study was used to answer the following research questions: Does a student's participation in an informal mentoring program increase positive behavioral characteristics influencing academic success? Do informal mentoring programs increase students' perceptions of supportive school atmospheres?

Frequency Analysis

Table 1 displays the frequency analysis of the survey items. For the survey items related to participant participation, 57.4% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I met with my mentor on a regular basis", 55% strongly agreed or agreed with "My mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes" and 49% strongly agreed or agreed with "I made it a priority to meet with my mentor", 71.3% strongly agreed or agreed with "I believe that my mentor wants to get to know me" and 72.4% strongly agreed or agreed with "My mentor is there to help me when I need him/her".

The frequency analysis for survey items targeted for environmental factors and behavioral outcome factors are also on Table 1. Seventy percent of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement "This program has gotten my parents more involved in my education". More than three-quarters of the respondents (77%) in this study strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "I will graduate from this school". Responses for the remaining items were split between 50% strongly agree or agree and 50% strongly disagree or disagree.

Table 1

Frequencies for Survey Items

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Engagement in Fo5				
1. I met with my mentor on a regular basis	25.30%	17.20%	26.40%	31%
2. I made it a priority to meet with my mentor	25.30%	25.30%	31%	18%
3. I believe my mentor wants to get to know me	19.50%	9.20%	34.50%	36.80%
5. My mentor is there to help me when I need him/her	21.80%	4.60%	32.20%	40.20%
12. My mentor checks in to see how I am doing	24.10%	20.70%	28.70%	26.40%
Behavioral Outcome Factors				
4. My grades have improved as a result of Fo5	33.30%	25.30%	31.00%	10.30%
6. My attendance has improved as a result of Fo5	34.50%	6.10%	26.40%	23%
7. This program has gotten my parents more involved in my education	40.20%	29.90%	17.20%	12.60%
8. I am on time to class as a result of Fo5	32.20%	26.40%	26.40%	14.90%
9. My classroom behavior has improved	36.80%	13.80%	31%	18.40%
Environmental Factors				
10. Adults in school comment when I am being helpful	25.30%	18.40%	36.80%	19.50%
13. Adults in school notice and comment when I am being respectful	20.70%	20.70%	34.50%	24.10%
14. I feel a part of this school	33.30%	20.70%	34.50%	24.10%
11. I will graduate from this school	18.40%	4.60%	21.80%	55.20%
15. I would recommend that other schools adopt Fo5	20.70%	12.60%	31%	35.60%

Correlations

Table 2 notes the significant correlation between “I met with my mentor on a regular basis” and the survey items relating to behavioral outcome factors, which are related to academic success (Legters & Balfonz, 2009; Little et al., 2010; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Table 3 notes the significant correlations between “My mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes” and the behavioral outcome factors. Table 4 notes the significant correlation between “I believe my mentor wants to get to know me” and behavioral outcome factors. For this study a 0.01 alpha level was used to determine the significance of the correlation analysis.

Table 2

Mentor Meetings and Related Behavioral Outcome Factors

Item	Correlation
I met with my mentor on a regular basis	
My grades have improved as a result of the F05 program	.613**
My attendance has improved as a result of the F05 program	.646**
This program has gotten my parents more involved in my education	.462**
I am on time to class as a result of the Fo5 program	.574**
My classroom behavior has improved as a result of the Fo5 program	.601**

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Mentor Checks and Related Behavioral Outcome Factors

Items	Correlations
My mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes	
My grades have improved as a result of the Fo5 program	.627**
My attendance has improved as a result of the F05 program	.663**
This program has gotten my parents more involved in my education	.561**
I am on time to class as a result of the F05 program	.657**

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 4

My Mentor Wants to Know Me and Related Behavioral Outcome Factors

Items	Correlation
I believe that my mentor wants to get to know me	
My grades have improved as a result of the Fo5 program	.613**
My attendance has improved as a result of the F05 program	.668**
My classroom behavior has improved as a result of the Fo5 program	.661**
This program has gotten my parents more involved in my education	.411**

Note. ** $p < .01$

Tables 5 and 6 identify the environmental factors that were significantly correlated with items: (a) I met with my mentor on a regular basis, and (b) my mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes.

Table 5

Meeting Regularly and Related Environmental Factors

Item	Correlation
I met with my mentor on a regular basis	
Adults at this school notice and comment when I am being helpful	.269*
Adults at this school notice and comment when I am being respectful	.286**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 6

Mentor Checks and Related Environmental Factors

Items	Correlation
My mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes	
Adults at this school notice and comment when I am being helpful	.348**
Adults at this school notice and comment when I am being respectful	.297**

Note. ** $p < .01$

Discussion

Schools across the nation are concerned with student achievement and graduation rates. Researchers attribute multiple risk factors, (i.e., single parent homes, poverty, exposure to violent incidents) for school age children as having a negative impact on their ability to achieve academic success (DeSocio et al., 2007; Herrera, Baldwin, Kual & McMaken, 2011; Sanchez,

Esparza & Colon, 2008). Nationally, the percentage of school age children experiencing multiple risk factors has increased. Multiple studies have found that mentoring relationships, between adults and students, increase student academic performance, decrease student engagement in risk behaviors, and increase student retention rates (De Anda, 2001; Cavell, Elledge, Malcom & Faith, 2009; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Studies have found that a youth, with a supportive relationship with at least one adult, increases the youth's ability to attain positive academic outcomes (De Anda, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2008).

This study was intended to identify the perceived effectiveness of an informal school-based mentoring program to create mentoring relationships that can influence students' perceptions of a supportive school environment and increase behavioral characteristics associated with academic success. Students who participated in this study were asked to rate their level of agreement on 15 items of a survey. The survey data collected in this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Does a student's participation in an informal mentoring program increase positive behavioral characteristics related to academic success?
2. Do informal mentoring programs increase students' perceptions of supportive school atmospheres?

Approximately 58% of students in this study reported some level of participation in Fo5. This study found a significant positive correlation between participation in the Fo5 program and students' perceptions that school was a positive learning environment. Student participants in the program were more likely to respond that they felt part of their school and that they felt

noticed and supported by adults in the building. The findings in this study are consistent with the literature. Students who have a connection with an adult in the building are more likely to perceive the school as a positive supportive learning environment (De Anda, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2008). Research has indicated that a student perceptions of positive supportive relationships with adults in the school setting as a significant factor in increasing a student's ability to be academically successful (Laguana-Riordan et al., 2011; Barrowclough & White, 2011; Zenkov, Harmon & Lier, 2008). The informal mentoring practices of the Fo5 program were shown to develop mentor relationships that had a significant impact on students' perceptions of their school environment.

Students' perceptions of achieving positive behavioral outcomes also had a significant positive correlation to participation in the Fo5 program. Students who participated in the Fo5 program were more likely to report that their behaviors related to academic success had improved. Research indicates that mentoring relationships in a school setting improve student attendance, decrease student behavioral issues, and increase student retention rates (Patterson et al., 2007; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2004). Thus, the data gathered in this study further supports the reports in the literature. The informal mentoring practices of the Fo5 program was shown to create a mentoring relationship that had a significant impact on the students' perceptions of improvement in their positive behavioral outcomes.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that impact the implications of the findings. Although every student in New York State is required to take a physical education class, students may not necessarily attend the class regularly. This study was administered during three

physical education class periods. A total of six classes participated in the survey. One hundred and seventy four students were listed on the combined attendance roster for the six classes. Ninety eight students attended the classes that were administered the survey. Eighty seven students completed the Fo5 survey. The students who attended the class and/or completed the survey may have reported different information than the students who did not attend class and complete the survey. A power analysis revealed that the sample size was too small to adequately represent the student population of the urban school setting.

The information collected in this survey was based on the students' perceptions of their experiences related to the Fo5 program. The actual level of participation, student behavioral change, and school environmental factors may be significantly different than student reports. Social desirability bias may have affected the results of this study. Students were allowed to sit with their peers to complete the survey, which may have influenced the students' response.

The researcher created the survey utilized in this research study and the validity and reliability of the instrument has not been determined.

Implications for School Counselors

The preliminary research findings of this study revealed that the Fo5 mentoring program is an effective intervention strategy to foster perceived student success. Student/staff participation in the program was approximately 58%. School counselors need to advocate for greater participation in the Fo5 program. The research findings demonstrated that participation in the Fo5 program had a positive effect on reported student behaviors and created a perception

of a supportive learning environment. Presenting the results of this study to student and staff may increase future participation in the program.

School counselors can create a Fo5 program outline for the building. The program outline would provide some guidelines for mentors and mentees. The frequency of meetings, level of contact, strategies that mentors utilized to foster relationships with the mentees varied greatly in this study. Loose program guidelines would support the consistent implementation of the program to support the overarching goals for the program. Students may present complex issues and needs to the mentor. School counselors can also provide mentor training and support.

Schools across the country are struggling with many of the same issues. School counselors can collect data to assist in determining the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies. Actual results and an analysis of the Fo5 programs' impact on students can be shared with other schools. School counselors can take the lead in a collaborative approach to developing effective programs to support students' academic success.

Recommendations for Future Research

Few research studies have specifically focused on informal mentoring programs in a school setting. There is a lack of data to support the effectiveness of informal mentoring. It is unclear what aspects of informal mentoring programs like the Fo5 are related to students' positive behavioral changes and supportive environmental perceptions. Further data collection is needed to determine if the students' perceptions can be correlated to actual changes.

Conclusion

The data collected as part of this research study indicates that participation in an informal school based mentoring program, Fo5, had an effect on student perceptions. Developing a relationship with a mentor increased students' perceptions that they had made behavioral changes that have been shown to increase academic success. Students who reported meeting with a mentor perceived that their school was a supportive environment, which has been shown to increase academic success.

References

- Ahrens, K., DuBois, D. L., Lozano, P., & Richardson, L. P. (2010). Naturally acquired mentoring relationships and young adult outcomes among adolescents with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 25*(4), 207-216.
- Ahrens, K. R., DuBois, D. L., Richardson, L. P., Fan, M. Y., & Lozano, P. (2008). Youth in foster care with adult mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. *Pediatrics, 121*(2), e246-e252.
- Aronowitz, T. (2005). The role of “Envisioning the Future” in the development of resilience among at-risk youth. *Public Health Nursing, 22*(3), 200-208.
- Aud, S., Hussar, W., Johnson, F., Kena, G., Roth, E., Manning, E., & Yohn, C. (2012). The Condition of Education 2012. *National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education*.
- Barrowclough, K. W., & White, C. H. (2011). Negotiating relational boundaries in adult-adolescent mentoring relationships. *Southern Communication Journal, 76*(2), 137-154.
- Bernstein, L., Rappaport, C. D., Olsho, L., Hunt, D., & Levin, M. (2009). Impact Evaluation of the US Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program. Final Report. NCEE 2009-4047. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*.
- Bickerstaff, S. (2010). “I felt untraditional”: High school leavers negotiating dominant discourses on “dropout.” *Journal of Education, 190*(3), 37–45.

- Cavell, T. A., Elledge, L. C., Malcolm, K. T., Faith, M. A., & Hughes, J. N. (2009). Relationship quality and the mentoring of aggressive, high-risk children. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 38*(2), 185-198.
- Charmaraman, L., & Hall, G. (2011). School dropout prevention: What arts-based community and out-of-school-time programs can contribute. *New directions for youth development, 2011*(S1), 9-27.
- Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2007). School characteristics related to high school dropout rates. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(6), 325-339.
- De Anda, D. (2001). A qualitative evaluation of a mentor program for at-risk youth: The participants' perspective. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 18*(2), 97-117.
- DeJong, M. (2004, February). Metaphor and the mentoring process. *Child and Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 3-17). Springer Netherlands.
- DeSocio, J., VanCura, M., Nelson, L. A., Hewitt, G., Kitzman, H., & Cole, R. (2007). Engaging truant adolescents: Results from a multifaceted intervention pilot. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(3), 3-9.
- DuBois, D. L., Doolittle, F., Yates, B. T., Silverthorn, N., & Tebes, J. K. (2006). Research methodology and youth mentoring. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*(6), 657-676.

- DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American journal of community psychology, 30*(2), 157-197.
- DuBois, D. L., & Rhodes, J. E. (2006). Introduction to the special issue: Youth mentoring: Bridging science with practice. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*(6), 647-655.
- DuBois, D. L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005). Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study. *American journal of public health, 95*(3), 518.
- Englund, M. M., Egeland, B., & Collins, W. A. (2008). Exceptions to high school dropout predictions in a low-income sample: Do adults make a difference?. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(1), 77-94.
- Evans, W. P., Marsh, S. C., & Weigel, D. J. (2010). Promoting adolescent sense of coherence: Testing models of risk, protection, and resiliency. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 20*(1), 30-43.
- Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annu. Rev. Public Health, 26*, 399-419.
- Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2007). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention and retrieval. *Children & Schools, 29*(3), 133-144.

- Gibson, D. M., & Jefferson, R. N. (2006). The effect of perceived parental involvement and the use of growth-fostering relationships on self-concept in adolescents participating in gear up. *Family Therapy, 33*(1), 29.
- Gur, M., & Miller, L. (2004). Mentoring improves acceptance of a community intervention for court-referred male persons in need of supervision (PINS). *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 21*(6), 573-592.
- Herrera, C., Grossman, J. B., Kauh, T. J., & McMaken, J. (2011). Mentoring in schools: An impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring. *Child development, 82*(1), 346-361.
- Herrera, C., Kauh, T. J., Cooney, S. M., Grossman, J. B., & McMaken, J. (2008). High school students as mentors: Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring impact study. *Public/Private Ventures*.
- Hickman, G. P., Bartholomew, M., Mathwig, J., & Heinrich, R. S. (2008). Differential developmental pathways of high school dropouts and graduates. *The Journal of Educational Research, 102*(1), 3-14.
- Hurd, N., & Zimmerman, M. (2010). Natural mentors, mental health, and risk behaviors: A longitudinal analysis of African American adolescents transitioning into adulthood. *American journal of community psychology, 46*(1), 36-48.
- Ikomi, P. A. (2010). Juvenile violent felony referrals and high school dropouts: Is there a relationship?. *International Journal of Academic Research, 2*, 379-384.

- Iver, M., & Abele, M. (2011). The challenge fo improving urban high school graduation outcomes: Findings from a randomized study of dropout prevention efforts. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 16(3), 167-184.
- Kaufman, M. R. (2010). Testing of the healthy “Little” lives project: A training program for Big Sister mentors. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 5(4), 305-327.
- Knesting, K. (2008). Students at risk for school dropout: Supporting their persistence. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 52(4), 3-10.
- Johnson, S. L., Burke, J. G., & Gielen, A. C. (2012). Urban students' perceptions of the school environment's influence on school violence. *Children & Schools*, 34(2), 92-102.
- Kolar, D. W., & McBride, C. A. (2011). Mentoring at-risk youth in schools: Can small doses make a big change?. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 19(2), 125-138.
- Knowles, C., & Parsons, C. (2009). Evaluating a formalized peer mentoring programs: student voice and impact audit. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 27(3), 205-218.
- Lagana-Riordan, C., Aguilar, J. P., Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., Tripodi, S. J., & Hopson, L. M. (2011). At-risk students’ perceptions of traditional schools and a solution-focused public alternative school. *Preventing School Failure*, 55(3), 105-114.
- Larose, S., Cyrenne, D., Garceau, O., Brodeur, P., & Tarabulsy, G. M. (2010). The structure of effective academic mentoring in late adolescence. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2010(126), 123-140.

- Lee, T., Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). High suspension schools and dropout rates for black and white students. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*(2), 167-192.
- Legters, N., & Balfanz, R. (2010). Do we have what it takes to put all students on the graduation path?. *New directions for youth development, 2010*(127), 11-24.
- Liem, J. H., Lustig, K., & Dillon, C. (2010). Depressive symptoms and life satisfaction among emerging adults: A comparison of high school dropouts and graduates. *Journal of adult development, 17*(1), 33-43.
- Little, C. A., Kearney, K. L., & Britner, P. A. (2010). Students' self-concept and perceptions of mentoring relationships in a summer mentorship program for talented adolescents. *Roeper Review, 32*(3), 189-199.
- Moodie, M. L., & Fisher, J. (2009). Are youth mentoring programs good value-for-money? An evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne Program. *BMC public health, 9*(1), 41.
- Patterson, J. A., Hale, D., & Stessman, M. (2007). Cultural contradictions and school leaving: A case study of an urban high school. *The High School Journal, 91*(2), 1-15.
- Pryce, J. M., Silverthorn, N., Sanchez, B., & DuBois, D. L. (2010). GirlPOWER! Strengthening mentoring relationships through a structured, gender-specific program. *New directions for youth development, 2010*(126), 89-105.

- Radcliffe, R. I. C. H. A. R. D., & Bos, B. (2011). Mentoring approaches to create a college-going culture for at-risk secondary level students. *American Secondary Education, 39*(3), 86-107.
- Randolph, K. A., & Johnson, J. L. (2008). School-based mentoring programs: A review of the research. *Children & Schools, 30*(3), 177-185.
- Smink, J., & Reimer, M. S. (2005). Fifteen effective strategies for improving student attendance and truancy prevention. *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network*.
- Sinclair, M. F., Christenson, S. L., & Thurlow, M. L. (2005). Promoting school completion of urban secondary youth with emotional or behavioral disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 71*(4), 465-482.
- Somers, C. L., Owens, D., & Piliawsky, M. (2009). A study of high school dropout prevention and at-risk ninth graders' role models and motivations for school completion. *Education, 130*(2), 348-356.
- Somers, C. L., & Piliawsky, M. (2004). Drop-out prevention among urban, African American adolescents: Program evaluation and practical implications. *Preventing School Failure, 48*(3), 17-22.
- Southwick, S. M., Morgan III, C. A., Vythilingam, M., & Charney, D. (2007). Mentors enhance resilience in at-risk children and adolescents. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 26*(4), 577-584.

Stoddard, S. A., McMorris, B. J., & Sieving, R. E. (2011). Do social connections and hope matter in predicting early adolescent violence? *American journal of community psychology, 48*(3), 247-256.

Tyler, J. H., & Lofstrom, M. (2009). Finishing high school: Alternative pathways and dropout recovery. *The Future of Children, 19*(1), 77-103.

Wheeler, M. E., Keller, T. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2010). Review of three recent randomized trials of school-based mentoring. *Social Policy Report, 24*(3).

White, S. W., & Kelly, F. D. (2010). The school counselor's role in school dropout prevention. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 88*(2), 227-235.

Wilson, S. J., Tanner-Smith, E. E., Lipsey, M. W., Steinka-Fry, K., Morrison, J., & Wilson, S. J. (2011). Dropout prevention and intervention programs: Effects on school completion. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 8*.

Zenkov, K., Harmon, J., & van Lier, P. (2008). Picture this: Seeing diverse youths' ideas about schools' purposes, supports, and impediments: Students from the "Through Eyes" project. *Multicultural Perspectives, 10*(3), 162-166.

Appendix A

1) **Project description:**

This project is an initial investigation into student perceptions of the “Family of Five” mentoring program in this school. The Family of Five program in this school is designed to reengage disenfranchised youth in the educational system. All staff members at this school are asked to mentor a family of five students. Staff members are asked to meet with each of the five students on a weekly basis, monitor their academic progress, develop a relationship with the students family and provide an opportunity for the student to develop a supportive relationship with adults in this school. Many of this school’s students have a significant history of poor academic performance, disciplinary issues, and truancy. This project will explore the students’ perceptions of their educational experience as part of the Family of Five program. The information gathered from this project will be used to develop future programming to support the students at this school. This project is conducted under the premises that students who feel supported by the adults in their lives will increase their ability to be academically successful.

2) **Number of participants and relevant characteristics:**

This survey will be administered to students in randomly select 10 multi-grade level classrooms at this school to distribute this survey in December 2012.

3) **Selection Process (how participants will be selected):**

The students will be selected randomly from all grade levels.

4) **Status of Research Assistants (background/qualifications):**

There are no research assistants for this project

5) **Source of Funding:**

There is no funding for this project.

6) **Start - Completion dates:**

The project will start upon IRB approval. Data will be collected in May 2013.

7) **Attach copies of all questionnaires, testing instruments, or interview protocols, and any cover letters or instructions to participants.** Please see the following attached materials:

- Statement of Informed Consent
- The Survey I plan to use

8) Attach a copy of your certificate of completion for the online training course. If you don't have it indicate that you completed it and records will be verified by the IRB Administrator.

I've completed it.

9) Anonymity/Confidentiality (how you will protect participants so they are not identified with their responses):

The survey will be administered to students in 10 randomly selected classrooms. No identifying information will be requested on the survey. Students will be reminded not to put their names or any identifying information on the completed surveys. Cover letters to protect anonymity will be included with the survey. Students will be asked to complete the survey before the end of the class period. Students will be asked to place the completed survey in an envelope located in the back of their classroom. Students will be asked to place the completed informed consent form in a separate envelope in the back of their classroom. The envelope will be sealed and collected at the end of the class period. Once the data is collected the completed surveys will be destroyed.

10) Consent form

A consent form with all of the required information has been attached to this document.

Appendix B

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

This form describes a research study being conducted with students about your perception related to key factors that influence your engagement in your educational plan. The person conducting the research is a student at The College at Brockport, SUNY. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your perceptions of the Family of Five mentoring program at this school.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned can by school staff to develop strategies to support future students.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in it or refusing to be in it, will not affect your grades or class standing. You are free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that by participating in this survey:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions. I will have a chance to discuss any questions I have about the study with the researcher after completing the questionnaire.
2. My anonymity is guaranteed. My name will not be written on the survey. There will be no way to connect me to the written survey. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified.
3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
4. My participation involves reading a written survey of 15 questions and answering those questions in writing. It is estimated that it will take 10 minutes to complete the survey.
5. Approximately 200 students will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher.
6. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed

Your completion of this survey signifies your consent to participate in this study. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
---------------------------	------------------------

<p>Renee Abbott</p>	<p>Summer Reiner</p>
<p>Counselor Education student</p> <p>██████████</p>	<p>Department of Counselor Education,</p> <p>585-395-5497</p>
<p>Rabb0913@brockport.edu</p>	<p>sreiner@brockport.edu</p>

Appendix C

Student survey:

Please rate the following statements to describe your experience in the Family of Five program. Respond N/A if the item does not apply to you.

- | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
1. I met with my mentor on a regular basis _____
 2. I made it a priority to meet with my mentor _____
 3. I believe that my mentor wants to get to know me _____
 4. My grades have improved as a result of the Family of Five program _____
 5. My mentor is there to help me when I need him/her _____
 6. My attendance has improved as a result of the Family of Five program _____
 7. This program has got my parents more involved in my education _____
 8. I am on time to class as a result of the Family of Five program _____
 9. My classroom behavior has improved as a result of the Family of Five program _____
 10. Adults in this school notice and comment when I am being helpful _____
 11. I will to graduate from this school _____
 12. My mentor checks in to see how I am doing in my classes _____
 13. Adults in this school notice and comment when I am being respectful _____
 14. I feel a part of this school _____
 15. I would recommend that other schools adopt the Family of Five program _____