

A First Look Into Its Potential

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September 1999

SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING: WHAT AND WHY

Research shows that providing youth with consistent adult support through a well-supervised, frequently meeting, long-term mentoring relationship improves grades and family relationships, and helps prevent initiation of drug and alcohol use (Tierney and Grossman, 1995). To expand the number of children who have access to these relationships, programs have begun to implement several innovative approaches to mentoring. Mentoring within the school context, or "school-based mentoring," is one of the most promising and rapidly expanding of these approaches. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) projects that by the year 2003, it will have established 100,000 school-based matches, about one-third of the agency's total.

In school-based mentoring, teachers from designated schools refer youth who could benefit from additional attention and guidance. Volunteers then meet with referred youth one-on-one during the school day, for one hour every week. Volunteers commit to meeting with the child for one school year and must limit their meetings to the school grounds and supervised school or BBBS activities. Mentors and youth usually spend some time on school work, but they also engage in other activities including sports, games, reading and eating lunch together.

Advocates of this approach claim that school-based mentoring has many benefits that make it a strong complement to the traditional community-based approach. First, it may attract volunteers who, because of their jobs, families, age or other life circumstances, would not volunteer in community-based programs that usually require at least three to five hours per week. This potential benefit is particularly important, given the difficulty of recruiting adult volunteers to community-based programs.¹

Second, because youth are referred by teachers instead of parents, the approach has the potential to reach youth whose parents lack the time, energy or inclination to involve their child in more intensive mentoring. Youth in community-based programs are typically referred by a parent who takes the initiative to contact the agency and go through the application process. Children from families facing extreme stress and crisis may not have this kind of advocate. Yet, these are the children who are in most need of the benefits that mentoring can provide.

Third, mentoring in the school context may enable BBBS staff to supervise matches more easily, effectively and inexpensively. Case management in community-based programs can be challenging because it is time-consuming to contact families. When youth and mentors meet in one location, this process is simplified. Teachers and other school personnel can also assist with supervision. These factors may make school-based mentoring programs less expensive than community-based programs.

Fourth, the school-based approach links the mentor to the school environment, making education a salient part of the mentoring relationship. This may help mentors to foster youth's academic improvement.

If these hypothesized advantages can be turned into an operational reality, the number of children positively influenced by high-quality mentoring could be significantly expanded. Yet, because school-based mentoring is relatively new, we know very little about these programs and whether they can begin to meet these expectations. Understanding how they operate and their

effectiveness will be critical in ensuring that national programs like BBBS, that reach thousands of children, do so in a way that can best benefit youth. It will also help determine where mentoring agencies should invest their limited resources during this time of rapid expansion. If school-based mentoring does not provide youth with strong adult relationships that contribute to their intellectual and social growth, resources may be better used to provide youth with the more traditional, "tried and true" community-based approach.

THE P/PV STUDY

Given the strong interest and resource decisions that are or will soon be made, P/PV thought it useful to provide some preliminary information about how seasoned school-based programs actually operate, whether these programs display potential for effectiveness and what, if any, implementation challenges decision-makers and program operators should be aware of. (The intention of this brief report is not to make a definitive statement about the benefits of school-based mentoring.)

To explore these issues, P/PV visited two BBBS school-based programs (recommended as exemplary by BBBSA): Big Brothers and Sisters of Green Country in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Florida, Inc., in Jacksonville, Florida. In addition to their traditional community-based programs, both agencies have served children in schools for over four years, and have seen rapid expansion and growth.² P/PV staff spent three days at each of the programs, talking with BBBS staff, parents, children, mentors and school personnel involved in the programs.³ Our goal in these visits was to take a preliminary look at the implementation and effects of well-run, seasoned school-based programs. We addressed five main questions:

- Who volunteers in school-based mentoring programs?
- Who are the youth served by school-based programs?
- How are volunteers recruited, screened, trained and supervised?

- Does meeting in the school setting offer youth or mentors anything that they could not get from community-based programs?
- Can one hour a week provide children with strong relationships that foster academic and behavioral change?

Our visits to these programs suggested that mentoring programs may have found a strong complement to their traditional community-based model and that well-run school-based mentoring programs are likely to be a powerful intervention for many disadvantaged youth. These programs may also be less costly than traditional one-on-one mentoring. One match in community-based programs costs about \$1,000 per year whereas a match in a school-based program costs about \$600.⁴

The mentoring field would clearly benefit from more attention to this innovative approach. In the

coming year, P/PV will follow up these qualitative impressions with a quantitative investigation of academic and behavioral changes in youth who are involved in these programs.

The following pages discuss these issues, present detailed answers to the questions posed, and describe P/PV's first look at some of the strengths, challenges and potential contributions of school-based mentoring.

WHO VOLUNTEERS IN SCHOOL- BASED MENTORING PROGRAMS?

One of the most important benefits of school-based mentoring is its potential to attract mentors who, because of their jobs, families, age or other life circumstances, would not volunteer in a time-intensive community-based program. This is particularly important, given the difficulty of recruiting adult volunteers. If school-based volunteers are not from the typical community-based volunteer pool, then school-based programs may have found a powerful new way to provide mentors to more children. On the other hand, if school-based mentors would be willing to volunteer in a community-based program, then program resources might be better spent in matching these volunteers with children who are already on their extensive community-based waiting list.

The 16 mentors we met—who varied in age, gender and profession—gave many reasons for their decision to volunteer in a school as opposed to a community setting. These reasons suggested that school-based programs may, in fact, attract many volunteers who would not or could not volunteer in community-based settings.

These school-based mentors tended to be professionals with limited time to devote to volunteering. Six of the 16 volunteers had families, demanding jobs, or other commitments that would make it difficult or impossible for them to volunteer three to five hours per week (the current requirement for BBBS community-based programs).⁵ The time commitment required by agencies is, in fact, across programs, the single most significant obstacle in recruitment (Freedman, 1992). One mentor told us:

I had considered [mentoring in] the traditional Big Brothers Big Sisters for years, but I concluded that I could not do it justice.

Although unable to make the commitment of three to five hours per week, this volunteer was a very dedicated mentor in the school-based program. The principal at his school reported that this mentor had taken the time to meet with school staff to intercede on behalf of his mentee and ensure that the child was being challenged academically.

An important source of volunteers in the programs we visited were corporations located close to the schools. In both of these programs, employed volunteers are allowed to leave work for two hours every week to participate in the program. Corporate recruitment had a secondary benefit of providing access to many male volunteers (about 30 percent of Tulsa's corporate volunteers are male). This is an important benefit because the majority of volunteers in most mentoring programs are female and most youth on waiting lists are male.

The structure and supervision of the school setting may appeal to men. One male mentor said that he chose school-based over community-based mentoring because he faced more risk of false accusations when working with youth outside of the closely supervised school environment:

I saw personally some jeopardy in the outside [community-based] program. For a man to be in a child's house or the child being at the man's house and not too many other people around—that poses jeopardy to me. And I think it poses jeopardy for the child. So I chose the in-school program. It's safe in a controlled environment.

This supervised environment may also facilitate more cross-sex matching: 13 of the 16 mentors indicated that they would be comfortable meeting with a child of a different sex in the school context; of these, only six said they would be comfortable with a cross-sex match outside of this context.

Three mentors, including one who had volunteered previously in a community-based program, commented that mentoring in the school context is more attractive to them than community-based programs because it provides distance from the home life of their mentees. They felt that being less involved with the youth's family helps them to focus their efforts on the child and keep their relationship distinct from the often overwhelming problems that the child faces at home.

North Florida, like several other BBBS programs, requires that their community-based mentors be at least 21 years old. School-based mentors do not have to meet this age requirement because of the increased supervision in the school context and because mentors are not allowed to transport youth. One 19-year-old mentor whom we met was too young to volunteer in the community-based program. Yet, she was a very active school-based mentor, having developed a particularly close relationship with her mentee and becoming involved in work with the child's entire classroom. At least 30 percent of Tulsa's mentors are of college age and over 10 percent of North Florida's mentors are high school students. Targeting institutions with large minority populations also means that school-based programs may have access to more minority volunteers.⁵ Because North Florida's agency chose one high school with predominantly African American students, many of these high school volunteers are African American. According to staff, these youth have been among the most reliable and committed volunteers, responsible for some of their biggest successes with youth, many of whom are minorities.⁶ Involving younger volunteers is also appealing in that it encourages youth from an early age to start volunteering in their communities.

WHO ARE THE YOUTH SERVED BY SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS?

Most of the youth in the programs we visited are elementary-age youth who were referred to the program by teachers, not parents.⁷ Many are also minorities. Youth attended schools serving extremely needy communities.⁸ Tulsa's program selects schools with a high proportion of free-lunch recipients, and North Florida chooses schools with low test scores and a high proportion of free-lunch recipients.

Within these schools, BBBS staff ask teachers to refer children who could benefit the most from adult guidance, either academically or behaviorally.⁹ Staff said they referred the most needy children, with a range of academic, social and behavioral problems. Some youth had been abused, were in foster care, or were taking medication for hyperactivity. Other children, particularly in early phases of the Tulsa program, were gifted or talented, but living in poverty. The vast majority of these youth had one characteristic in common: a family that was either uninvolved or overwhelmed. Most families were economically stressed, had a single or chronically ill parent, or had survived a traumatic event.

One mentor told us that his 11-year-old mentee has a mother who works until 1:00 a.m., so he has to put himself to bed every night. Another volunteer described her mentee as "a third grader with a first grade reading level . . . There's no support at home . . . In fact, the mother will even throw [the child's] work in the trash." A case manager told us that this lack of parental involvement in and

support of their children's education was the mentors' biggest frustration with the program. As one mentor noted:

Many of the parents are in the same boat that their kids will be in, so they don't see the need for being able to read or do long division or anything like that. These kids are bound to drop out of high school.

The neighborhoods in which these children live were described by school staff as extremely disadvantaged.¹⁰ Combined with their often chaotic home life, this setting may prevent these youth from being served in a program based outside of the school environment. As one teacher commented:

A lot of our kids—you're not going to find a mentor that wants to go into their house . . . Our mentors like to meet at school because their homes can be scary and dirty . . . As an adult, I wouldn't want to be matched up with a child that lives in one of these areas. I'd probably ask [BBBS] to place me somewhere else.

BBBS staff echoed this concern:

A lot of volunteers would not go to these children's homes because they wouldn't feel safe . . . but they will go to a school, and in the day time . . . a school [feels safer] especially for women.

We also heard about a parent who was extremely verbally abusive to his stepson during the community-based home visit. Because of this, the child was not provided with a mentor in the community-based program, but later was matched with a school-based mentor.

Of the 12 youth we interviewed, six reported that they had been meeting with their mentor for less than one school year. At first glance, they appeared to be carefree children who talked openly with us about the day-to-day issues facing elementary age youth: scary cafeteria staff, the drudgery of school work, or having fun playing football or flying kites with their mentor. But, when we talked with the teachers of these children, met some of their parents and asked staff about their family situations, we got a much more disturbing picture of the hardships that these children face outside the school context. One child's mother was diagnosed with cancer. Another had lost a sibling. Another remarkably bright child lives in a filthy apartment with junk covering the floors, pets that urinate on what little furniture exists, and an infestation of cockroaches. The child's mother forbids anyone except the child and his sibling to enter the apartment and the child is not allowed to leave except to go to school. One 11-year-old is already involved in gang activity, and others were on medication or are learning disabled.

Given these circumstances, it would seem that the families of these children would not have the time, ability or interest to make the effort required to involve their child in community-based mentoring. This is unfortunately the case for many of these children. We met with six very concerned, involved parents who had seven children enrolled in the program. Despite clear interest in their child's welfare, they were over-whelmed. One was a single parent who had tried to involve her child in the community-based program, but when faced with its waiting list, chose the school-based program instead.¹¹ Another struggling couple had five children attending three different schools. The father was disabled and the mother worked a night job. Two of their children had been molested, so they insisted on the security of the school setting and would not have involved their child in a community-based program. Coming from a two-parent family, as did eight of the 12 children whom we met, their daughter also would not have been eligible for a mentor in many BBBS community-based programs.¹²

HOW ARE VOLUNTEERS RECRUITED, SCREENED, TRAINED AND SUPERVISED?

One of the trademarks of BBBS is the careful screening, training and supervision of community-based matches. These ingredients are thought to be essential in creating strong matches that meet consistently (Furano, Roaf, Styles and Branch, 1993). Thus, we were interested in these aspects of program infrastructure. We asked BBBS staff and school-based mentors about their experiences in these areas and in recruitment.

Recruitment

School-based mentoring seems to be conducive to institutional recruitment. Many volunteers in the programs we visited were recruited through their employer as part of their company's "adopt-a-school" program. This is true particularly in Tulsa where one corporation alone contributes over 20 percent of the agency's school-based mentors. Similarly, recruitment of high school and college-age students, based at their campus, requires less time from BBBS staff. Focusing recruitment efforts on a limited number of sites also allows the agency to target volunteers with particular demographic characteristics. For example, mentors from one high school in North Florida's program are predominantly African American and about 30 percent of Tulsa's corporate volunteers are male.

Screening and Training

Because school-based mentors are not allowed to be alone with or transport children, screening for these programs is not as rigorous as that in BBBS community-based programs. All school-based volunteers must submit an application, participate in an in-depth interview, go through a criminal background check, and submit personal and employer references. In addition to these requirements, volunteers in community-based programs are screened by the Department of Motor Vehicles and must have a valid driver's license and insurance. A visit to the mentor and child's home and, in some programs, a psychological inventory are also required for community-based mentors. School-based mentors who decide to move into the community-based program (fewer than 5 percent in North Florida) go through this additional screening process.

Training for school-based programs is fairly similar to that for community-based programs. Volunteers in North Florida attend a two-hour and 45-minute group training that covers the same issues discussed in community-based mentor training, including communication, relationship-building and how to report suspicions of abuse. Staff also talk with school-based mentors about issues unique to working in the school setting, such as interacting with teachers, areas of the school that can be used as meeting places and working with staff to use school equipment. In addition to materials given to mentors in the community-based program, school-based mentors in North Florida also receive a 45-page manual with ideas for activities to build self-esteem and to teach children about understanding feelings and goal-setting. Mentors in the program told us that they appreciated these materials, especially in the school setting where volunteers cannot leave the school grounds and must make specific plans for their weekly meetings with youth.

In addition to this pretraining, North Florida offers its school-based mentors access to quarterly in-service trainings. Tulsa also holds quarterly mentor discussion groups that allow volunteers to discuss issues that concern them.

Supervision and Support

Match supervision is the aspect of infrastructure in which the school-based programs we visited diverged most from their community-based counterparts. Similar to community-based case managers, school-based case managers are required to speak with the mentor and child every month. However, in addition, BBBS staff who supervise school-based matches also communicate with teachers and other school personnel. Case managers in North Florida's program are required to meet with the child's teacher quarterly and, although Tulsa's case managers do not have this requirement, they also meet with many teachers regularly, especially in cases of children who are particularly needy.

Directors of the programs we visited encouraged their staff to spend as much time as possible at the schools to ensure that school personnel were comfortable and familiar with them and the program. This seemed to work well in all of the schools that we visited. BBBS staff were known by name by front-office staff, principals, counselors and teachers, and were greeted with a friendly "hello," praise and requests for more mentors. BBBS staff were provided with in-boxes at most schools and occasionally were given office space.

Contact with Teachers

Their presence in the schools also allows BBBS staff to meet with teachers easily. The frequency of these meetings varies and depends, in part, on how needy the child is and how receptive the particular teacher is. In some middle schools in Tulsa, teachers and program staff meet very infrequently, whereas one elementary school teacher in Tulsa with several matched children in her classroom told us:

I talk to her [the case manager] maybe every two to three weeks and sometimes two or three times in a week . . . usually I catch her in the office accidentally.

In North Florida's program, case managers meet with teachers at least quarterly. One very dedicated case manager talks with teachers on average every two months. Staff also talk with school liaisons (e.g., a school counselor or principal) during their visits to the school. Informal meetings that we observed between program staff and school liaisons were used to check on troubling family situations or to collaborate on strategies to work more effectively with mentors.

Teachers provide information to BBBS staff that is helpful both before the match is made and as it progresses. Prior to making the match, school staff can provide a wealth of information about their students that otherwise would be inaccessible. Teachers are asked about the child's interests, strengths and weaknesses, both academically and socially. As one teacher told us:

Most parents don't like to admit fault with their kids [i.e., to see their children's problems]. So we can . . . be an outside, objective, overseer of what's going on and let them know honestly what the child might need to work on.

Case managers in Tulsa told us that they use this information to create more effective matches by telling the volunteer all about their potential mentee and determining whether the volunteer is comfortable with these characteristics. As the executive director of this program told us:

The case manager's interview with the parent and with the child . . . maybe only totals three to four hours of direct contact [in community-based programs]. These teachers see these kids six hours a day, weeks and weeks on end. In some capacity, my children's teachers know my children as well as I do.

School staff can also provide a layer of supervision that is absent from community-based programs, by giving case managers information about how the match is progressing, whether the mentor is coming regularly, and any improvements or setbacks in the child. Learning more about the role of teachers in school-based programs will be an important goal for future research. For example, does teacher input help to create more compatible matches? Does their involvement increase the consistency with which volunteers meet with youth? It will also be important to outline how frequently BBBS staff should meet with teachers to fully benefit from their input. Because it is usually highly involved teachers who meet with BBBS staff most frequently, it will also be important to learn how to garner support and involvement from teachers who are not initially supportive.

Contact with Children

Because the children and mentors meet at school, communication with the child is easier than in community-based programs and usually occurs more than once a month. Phone contact with community-based youth is often extremely difficult because many families are very mobile or do not have a phone. School-based BBBS staff talk face-to-face with children sometimes as often as once a week and, based on their conversations with teachers, know a great deal about their home lives. Both the program directors and case managers whom we met know the names, faces and histories of all the children under their supervision. When we asked children who they would go to if they had a problem with their mentor, they indicated their case manager by her first name; the same was true for parents. One teacher talked about the relationship between the case manager and children in her classroom:

When she comes in, all the kids matched in my class run to her and give her hugs and kisses. She's social and personal with the children. She makes them feel special. She's won their hearts and when the matches are made, they are eager to please.

Having easy access to children and information about the progress of the match also allows case managers to work with larger caseloads than case managers in community-based programs: full-time school-based case managers supervise as many as 100 matches in North Florida,¹³ significantly more than the average caseload of about 50 in BBBS community-based programs.

Contact with Mentors

Although case managers in these school-based programs see mentors less often than they see youth, and usually contact the mentors by phone rather than face-to-face (as is also the case in community-based programs), both programs we visited have created additional systems for match supervision. Mentors sign in at the school's front office every day that they meet with youth, noting their activities during the visit and any issues that may have arisen. When BBBS staff visit the schools, they can use this log to check on matches and communicate with volunteers.

The mentors said this intensive supervision was a powerful determinant of the quality of their

experience in the program:

The quality of my caseworker helps me feel much better or much worse about my participation. I've had caseworkers who I've never heard from ever, ever, ever . . . And I have a caseworker right now who is outstanding . . . You feel so much more connected to the situation if you've got a good caseworker.

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ther mentor who works with the same case manager agreed: "We're talking all the time and that makes me feel like she's not off in the boonies and really cares about me." One North Florida volunteer discussed how she had worked with her case manager and mentee to create a table of rewards for good behavior. Because many of the child's requested rewards required transportation (e.g., a trip to Disneyworld) and the mentor cannot transport the child, her case manager agreed to take the child out for his rewards:

[My case manager] is into it just as much [as I am]. So it's like you have a partner. It's not like you're on your own.

This additional support is critical, particularly when working with youth from such disadvantaged backgrounds:

I really needed her support. I was as scared as he [the child] was when we got started. We're from such different backgrounds.

It is important to note that the programs we visited and the case managers whom we met were exemplary. Staff from two different schools had previously worked with matches made through other mentoring programs, but had not seen as much progress in the children. They attributed this to the enthusiasm and intense involvement of their current BBBS case managers. Because turnover is fairly high in many mentoring agencies, training all staff to provide excellent supervision to their matches, and carefully outlining what this supervision should entail, will be an important next step to ensure that as high-quality case managers leave the agency, others can be trained to fill their position.

DOES MEETING IN THE SCHOOL SETTING OFFER YOUTH OR MENTORS ANYTHING THAT THEY COULD NOT GET FROM COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS?

Schools have their own distinct cultures and bureaucracies, and vary in how open they are to outside intervention. Recognizing this, BBBSA recommends that school-based programs make efforts to hire staff who have some experience in this context. The director of Tulsa's program and several of the program's key staff have backgrounds in education, which has helped the staff not only to relate well with the children but also to understand what school personnel need in order to trust and support the program.

The schools we visited were, for the most part, very supportive of the program. However, case managers told us that this is not always true, and that often lack of school support can be a source of frustration for both BBBS staff and the mentors. One case manager estimated that of the seven schools she worked in, two were extremely supportive, one was not supportive at all, and the remaining four were good, but not overly supportive.

Benefits to Mentors

Staff we interviewed from four very supportive elementary schools mentioned that they make extra efforts to keep mentors informed of children's progress and setbacks. Hearing regularly about progress that the child is making and getting direction in areas that need work may be less common in community-based programs, in which the mentor does not have regular contact with others who closely monitor the child's academic and behavioral progress on a daily basis. One mentor told us:

[The teacher] definitely commented on his progression academically and [changes in] attitude that she saw. And it took her to connect those changes to the role I was playing. I wouldn't

necessarily attribute it to my one hour, but to her, it was him trying to please me . . . so she made that connection for me.

Hearing that they are making a difference is important for the volunteers, as one case manager indicated:

The mentors are proud if the child comes to school, likes his classes more, if [the mentor] taught him something, or he improves attendance . . . They like to know that they've helped . . . They want to see a difference. That's why they're there.

Another benefit of working in the school context is the added support that can be provided by other mentors who are based at the same school. One case manager told us:

There's a phase when kids almost always push mentors away. I've had several volunteers help each other with that . . . Or they might see someone else's Little Brother in the office, in trouble. [It makes them realize] 'Okay, it happens.'

Mentor networks also can provide ideas for activities and help case managers with supervision.¹⁴

Benefits to Youth: The School

Perhaps the most direct benefit that youth receive from school-based mentoring is the mentor's integration into the school environment and the role of advocate that the mentor can take on. This role takes many forms in the programs we visited. The most common are the conversations between the mentor and the child's teacher to discuss the child's needs. Although not as common, mentors and case managers also told us about other forms of advocacy. One volunteer met with outside professionals about his mentee's physical health and attended parent-teacher conferences. Another set up meetings with the principal to discuss his mentee's difficulties in the classroom. A case manager in Tulsa confirmed that several of her volunteers are involved in parent-teacher conferences, science fairs and other school events, especially when parents fail to get involved. By working closely with the child, mentors may also see difficulties that would otherwise be missed. A teacher told us about a mentor who discovered his mentee's dyslexia; the teacher had not seen any symptoms because her students do not read out loud in class. Because these children often have behavioral difficulties and their parents are often uninvolved, having an advocate becomes even more important. Two mentors told us that parents of their mentees (including one parent whom we met) wanted their children in the program specifically because, as single working parents, they did not have time to get involved in school activities and wanted someone to ensure that the child was progressing well in school.

In the school context, teachers and other school staff can be incorporated into the mentoring relationship in positive ways. One mentor talked about setting up a network of three school staff for her mentee so that on days that she could not meet with him, he could check in with people in the front office to make sure that he ate breakfast, was dressed appropriately for school, and was ready for the day:

The teachers . . . were always the ones disciplining him. But now they're saying, 'Look, I care about you' . . . and he has these great friendships now!

One principal at a school with 32 matches knew the names of several of these children and the names of their mentors. A case manager also mentioned the involvement of other school staff:

One Big Sister pooped out on me last year. I walked into the building and the custodian says, 'Tasha's Big Sister hasn't been here in two weeks.' I walked past the library, the librarian says, 'Tasha's Big Sister hasn't been here in two weeks.' Both office people say it, too. I check my box and there's a note from Tasha's teacher saying the same thing.¹⁵

Forging these relationships with school staff may help to improve the child's reputation in the school. The mentor who set up a staff network for her mentee commented:

I think I affect Randy. But I think I also affect the teachers and the principal . . . Now, seeing Randy around more in the office and seeing that he's making an effort, and knowing that we have this relationship, I feel that her [the principal's] attitude toward Randy—it's softer. I think the teachers and the staff see him a little bit differently and react differently to him when I'm around, or since I've been around.

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of the 12 children whom we met felt that their mentor had improved their relationship with their teacher. More than half of the parents we met also agreed that their child had benefitted in this way.

The mentors whom we met collaborated with school and BBBS staff, sharing information to create a "safety net" for children in their care, particularly those children who were most needy. Teachers and mentors told us that they communicate regularly, especially when the children are having problems. Talking outside of the school context was not mentioned by many of the mentors or teachers whom we met; however, it did occur on occasion:

I have a really close relationship with the teacher. We talk on a regular basis. Any time there are any sort of behavioral or academic problems, she would call me at home, almost weekly. I also talked to the counselor several times at the school.

Another counselor told us that she has e-mailed information about children to their case manager and the case manager forwarded these letters to the children's mentor. This counselor also used her access to the school's main computer to help BBBS staff find children who had "disappeared." In another case, a case manager told us that a fifth grader under her supervision was worried about her upcoming transition to middle school. The case manager reassured the child by letting her know that she had already told the middle school counselor about her and the counselor would be there for her when she arrived. As one teacher noted:

That just takes us as a school community into their normal life, whereas the ones that come from being community-based, we never see them and have no contact with them. That safety net has a big hole in it.

One very involved parent cited this partnership between the mentors and the students' teachers as the biggest strength of the school-based program.

Benefits to Youth: Peers

Children, mentors, BBBS staff and school staff agreed that being involved in the program is seen by the children's classmates as an enviable perk. This may help children in the program to be seen more positively by their peers—an especially important benefit, given that many of these youth have social and behavioral problems and may be rejected by their peer group. One mentor told us about the effects that she has had on her mentee's classmates:

Michelle had problems with kids making fun of her before she got into this program. Now, everyone in her classroom knows me when I show up, and everyone wants a Big Sister now, because they think she's so cool that she has one.

And in another case:

It gives him some bragging rights. You get that for free, just by being there. You don't have to do anything . . . So I bring a tuna sandwich or something and a couple of those little potato chip bags. And he hands them out to his buddies, so he gets another medal!

Teachers echoed this in talking about another child whom we met:

It may give Joseph something to talk about with other kids. Joseph is gifted and talented, but he also has so many social and behavioral problems that I think that probably gives him an 'in' with some kids.

And in another case:

Michael could have been having the worst day in the world and Martin [his mentor] could walk in and his posture would change and his attitude would change. He would be like that for a few days. And there is that pride that this person comes to see me. Most of our mentors come dressed very nicely—even the college kids that come in. It's a big boost to the kid's social standing. The other

kids respect them more and respond to them better when they have Bigs.

Because we had very limited contact with middle school staff and did not speak with any children in middle school, we could only begin to scratch the surface of school-based mentoring at the middle school level and its effects on peer relationships. We spoke with two Tulsa mentors who were based in middle schools. Both felt that their mentee was still receptive to them after their transition. One mentioned that peers also continued to see their relationship positively. However, unlike her experience at the elementary school level, privacy was sometimes an issue at this older age, with her mentee being less comfortable confiding in her with other youth around.

Benefits to the Teacher and Classroom

By bringing other adults into the classroom to work with children who are particularly needy, teachers told us that they get some relief from constantly attending to those children who require the most attention:

[The kids with social needs] don't have any friends. We have some kids that just cling to us all day long . . . They raise their hand just to say, 'Hello.' And if you can find anybody else to take some of that for them, to direct their neediness, it gives them another person.

Other children in the class may also change their behavior, as seen in one mentor's description of the class she works with:

On Monday, the teacher says that around 1:00 they all start being extra good because I'm coming. So, when I come in there, it's just like they're all on their best behavior.

CAN ONE HOUR A WEEK PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS THAT FOSTER ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE?

The development of a strong relationship is the first step in affecting a child's life through mentoring.

Recent research has shown that the better the relationship, the more positive the effects on youth

(Grossman and Rhodes, 1999). Thus, to address the issue of effect, we first examined the types of relationships that formed in these school-based programs; then we talked to teachers, mentors, parents and children about academic and behavioral changes they observed and experienced as a result of their involvement in the program.

Relationship Development

Our interviews suggest that in many cases, volunteers are able to develop relationships with youth in these programs. Five of the six parents we met indicated that a very strong bond had developed between the children and their mentors; the sixth parent had only been involved in the program for two months. Teachers talked about children who beam when their mentors walk into the classroom. And children talked about how disappointed they are when their mentors are not able to make their weekly meeting.

Mentors also reported very close relationships with youth. A case manager told us about a mentor whose match will be ending soon because he will be going to graduate school:

He said, 'My expectation was, almost all volunteers are involved in children's school activities. I thought I'd influence the child and focus on school work, but we became friends, and I love him. It's been very difficult.'

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ing our mentor focus group, that same mentor reiterated the intense role he had taken on in this child's life:

I think teachers come to view you almost as a pseudo parent in a way. They would say some things to you like they would to a parent. Sometimes it almost gives you too much responsibility. Sometimes, I've felt overwhelmed, like it was my child in a way.

One child whom we met described his mentor as "a very best friend." His mother in a separate interview told us that she spends a lot of time at the school, so she has seen the two of them interacting: "They get along just like they were brothers." In our survey, we asked children and mentors how close they felt to the person with whom they were matched. On a four-point scale ranging from "Not close at all" to "Very close," five of the 12 children responded with, "Very close"; five responded with "Somewhat close"; and two responded with "Not very close" (both of these last two children had been meeting with their mentor for six months or less); none responded with "Not close at all." Although meeting with different youth, the mentors responded similarly: seven of the 16 mentors indicated that they felt "Very close" to their mentees; nine responded that they felt "Somewhat close."

One of the main reasons these relationships are able to flourish is careful supervision by BBBS staff and their consistent message about the importance of being a friend to the child. In North Florida, mentors are asked to focus the first six to eight weeks with the child on relationship development, and are given great latitude in choosing activities for their meetings. Although most matches did spend some time on school work, they also played sports outside, ate lunch together, played games, read together in the library, or remained in the classroom working on the computer. Several of the children we met told us that they helped their mentor to choose these activities.¹⁶ Giving children a voice in choosing activities and how they spend time with the mentor is important in the development of strong mentoring relationships (Morrow and Styles, 1995). Developing this relationship is stressed as a critical goal, and the mentors agreed with this focus:

Although we do spend time on academics, I do not want our relationship to be strictly academic. I want to be a friend to her who she can talk to. And I'm not a teacher—I'm not her mom.

Children also agreed that friendship was central to their meetings. In our survey, we asked children whether their mentor reminded them most of a teacher, a friend or a parent. Only one of the 12 children responded with "a teacher"; the other 11 responded with "a friend." And when asked what they wanted from the program, children did not tell us that they wanted a teacher or tutor. Instead, they told us, "I needed a brother, my real brother died," "I wanted a good Big Brother because my real big brother always listens to hard rock and watches rated R movies," or "I needed a sister, and needed someone to talk to besides my Mom, because she's always at work, or on the phone. I needed someone to talk to." When asked about their favorite activity, about half of the children responded with games, others mentioned playing on the computer. Four of the children told us that talking was their favorite thing to do with their mentor. When asked, "What do you like most about your mentor?" children again mentioned the importance of being able to talk with their mentor: "She listens to whatever I have to say"; "If I talk to him, he'll understand, and not start laughing."

It is difficult to say from our preliminary visits, how long these relationships will remain intact, especially because the programs we visited have been working in the schools for a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately, because mobility is so high in the schools served by these programs, many youth move, ending the match. Mobility in the mentors can also be a problem, especially when involving high school and college-age mentors and those whose jobs require mobility (about 15 to 20 percent of North Florida's mentors are in the Navy). However, in cases where the child and mentor do not move, many matches continue to the next school year. In Tulsa, about 78 percent of school-based mentors will return in the upcoming year to

meet with the same child. Of those matches that closed last spring, about 70 percent ended their relationship because the child or mentor had moved; 20 percent plan to remain in the program but matched with a different child; and others (fewer than 10 percent) were closed because the volunteer was too busy, the match stopped meeting, the child did not want to continue in the program, or the volunteer did not want to transition with the child to middle school. Matches that end because the child or mentor moves sometimes remain in contact, sending letters and packages on birthdays. Matches are also encouraged to communicate by phone or mail during the summer.

Teachers and mentors in Tulsa told us that in many cases, mentors meet with youth more than the required one hour per week. One case manager estimated that mentors meet with youth about one and a half hours per week. As one teacher told us:

I don't know of any that just take one hour per week to be with their child, it's always more. And what they do for the kids doesn't stop when they walk out the door.

One mentor agreed that he spends from zero to three and a half hours with his mentee each week, depending on whether more time is needed for class projects.

Another indication of the quality of these relationships is the extent to which parents and children wish the pair could meet more. All of the parents we met preferred to have more contact between the mentors and their children. Many of the children we met also preferred more extensive contact: eight of the 12 children preferred to meet both inside and outside of school; one wanted to meet only outside of school; and three preferred to meet only at school.

One of the biggest challenges of school-based mentoring is that the programs are set up only in certain schools. Thus, if the child changes schools and the program is not active in the new school, the mentoring relationship is usually ended. So far, Tulsa has been able to follow all the children who have continued in the program through the transition to middle school; North Florida and many other programs do not have this policy. When children in these programs transition to middle school, the match is usually ended, unless it becomes a community-based match. Mentors and parents are frustrated with this aspect of the program, especially given the difficulty that many youth have during this transition and the continuity that mentors could help to provide. One mentor told us that the mother of her previous mentee had tried to pick middle schools for the child to attend, based on whether or not the school was linked with the BBBS program, just so that the match could stay together. Although Tulsa has been able to follow children to middle school, Tulsa's program is smaller than North Florida's and may find that, as the program expands, this may become a bigger challenge, particularly in schools that are not yet involved in the program. Mentoring agencies will need to consider how to overcome the transition issue, especially during this time of rapid expansion.

Academic Effects

The goal of about 65 percent of North Florida's matches is to improve grades; 30 percent focus on behavioral changes. Academic changes were, in fact, the most common effect that children told us about. About half of the parents we spoke with agreed both that they wanted academic change and that their children had made significant academic improvements since being involved in the program. Children improved in a range of subjects, including math, reading, social studies and citizenship. One child told us that she had improved in math. Her parents, however, told us that her academic gains were much more significant:

Her grades have come up a lot. In Chicago she was making straight As. We came here and she was making straight Fs. Now, she's making As and Bs and Cs.

Another mentor told us that although she did not focus on academics with her mentee, the child made significant academic progress:

I [mentored] a girl before and I felt like I did nothing. Like I came, we ate pizza. We ate happy meals. I felt like I did nothing. And she went from being a D student, and she had stayed back the previous two years, to being honored by the Mayor at some big luncheon. And I didn't feel like I was doing anything. So, maybe it was one of those situations where all she needed was someone to come and give her attention during the week.

As mentioned earlier, mentoring that is focused on providing friendship for youth can lead to the development of strong relationships; and strong relationships can foster significant positive changes in youth (Morrow and Styles, 1995; Tierney and Grossman, 1995).

Mentors may also help children to make academic gains by providing an incentive for them to come to school more often. Parents and children agreed that children rarely missed school on days the mentor is scheduled to come. Eight of the 16 mentors we met with agreed that they had helped their mentee in this way; the others did not think attendance had been a problem for their mentee. Ten of the 12 youth we met also felt their mentor had helped them to improve their attendance.

Improvements in Confidence

When we asked teachers about changes they saw in youth involved in the program, three of the four teachers mentioned increased confidence as a common area of improvement:

His behavior [was the biggest change], and then he started doing his academics a little bit better . . . It gives them confidence . . . to behave and to try things that they never tried before. It just depends on the kid too, I guess. It's really whatever the kid needs that happens. I haven't seen a match that didn't work yet.

When asked in our survey, "What's the most important thing your mentor has done for you?" two of the 12 children mentioned building confidence: "[She] helped me to think more about myself" and "She taught me to believe in myself a lot!" A mentor reiterated this focus: "I have taught her how to believe in herself, and that she is beautiful, important and can be successful." All 12 youth whom we met agreed that their mentor had helped them to feel good about themselves. All the mentors also agreed.

Behavior and Attitude Effects

In addition to academic changes and improvements in children's confidence, we also heard about sometimes dramatic changes in youth's behavior. These changes were most often mentioned by teachers, one of whom stressed that academic and behavioral changes are very closely linked in the classroom; a change in one often leads to a change in the other.

In one striking case:

He had an attendance problem. If he came to school two or three days per week, that was a lot. When he was in school we had to put tape around his desk. He was not allowed outside of that area because he hurt people and when he wasn't hurting people he was mistreating people. Once he had a mentor, he came to school every day. When the school moved from . . . about three miles east of here, he walked in the rain to come to school because he wanted to be there. He stopped threatening people. He still got into fights sometimes, but it made a dramatic difference. He never really got to the point where he did all of our assignments but he turned in a science fair project. That was a dramatic difference.

Another teacher told us with tears in her eyes, about an extremely needy child who developed a particularly close relationship with his mentor:

Vincent came from another school, self-reporting that he was in suspension and beating people up all the time. He was proud of the role he had fallen into. He had a big change in grades and behavior in school . . . He doesn't have a bad reputation here, and a lot of it is because of Steve . . . He comes from a neglectful and abusive family . . . Recently, Vincent told Steve, 'I love you Steve.'

Although we did not get to meet this child, we did meet his mentor, a retiree who was extremely dedicated to the program and to his work with this child. He also attested to the attachment that this child had developed to him—the excitement the child shows when he stays for lunch and the disappointment when he misses a meeting.

Mentors have also taught children seemingly small, but critical skills. One volunteer taught her mentee how to make eye contact and shake hands when meeting someone. Since then, he has been introducing her to staff across the school grounds. In another case:

[A volunteer was matched with] a boy with severe behavioral problems who would not make eye contact with anyone. His mentor came in a police uniform and Marcus loved that. Marcus got attention. All the kids wanted to sit with him. And he would sit up proudly in his seat, beaming. Marcus moved, but by the time he moved, he was able to have conversations one-on-one and look you in the eye, because of his mentor . . . Marcus with his self-esteem and attention [problems], we [school staff] couldn't have offered that.

Because mentors come to the classroom during their work day, dressed for their job, their occupation may be a salient part of their relationship with youth and may affect children's aspirations. Several children proudly told us the occupation of their mentor. One Hispanic child whom we met was matched with a mentor who speaks Spanish and has Hispanic relatives. His teacher told us:

[Meeting with his mentor] gave him a different direction. Instead of thinking that he is going to work on a concrete crew when he grows up, he now thinks that he wants to wear a suit and tie. He wants to get off at 5:00 p.m. and not be sweaty. And he wears aftershave and combs his hair and brushes his teeth.

Extent of Effects

In considering these potential effects, several important points must be made. First, changes take time. One parent was very anxious to see change in her son, even though he had only been meeting with his mentor for two months. Parents who had been involved in the program longer understood that this process takes time:

I would like to say that in one hour a week, Brian could make my son a new person, but that's not going to happen. Maybe he changes him for one hour or for four days, but it doesn't matter. Those things are important because somewhere down the road, maybe he'll remember it and it'll kick in.

This parent mentioned that although her son is now getting As and Bs, it took one year of involvement in the program for him to make this progress.

Second, some changes may be context specific. Several teachers noted cases when the mentor could not meet with the child for a while, the child changed schools, or the mentor was inconsistent in her visits, and the child's behavior worsened. This is important for two reasons: (1) mentors are only required to make a school-year commitment to the program; and (2) in many school-based programs, children are not followed when they transition to middle school. This means that many youth may meet with their mentor for only one school year. An important area for growth in these

programs is to try to make changes in children that last. Because short-lived relationships can have negative repercussions for youth (Grossman and Rhodes, 1999), programs may want to implement formal procedures to help children through the process of losing contact with a mentor.

Finally, academic or behavioral gains are not always made, despite the efforts of the mentor and the

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elopment of a strong relationship. As one case manager told us:

I have a lot of really good matches but the children are still failing. There's a volunteer who's excellent and she goes at least every week. They love each other but the child will fail this year anyway. It is only one hour per week. A good match doesn't mean success in school or success in behavior.

Other families simply face too many adversities as shown in the case of Michael, who was discussed earlier as having extreme behavioral problems. His mentor transitioned with him to middle school, but despite their close relationship, was not able to compensate for his extremely abusive home life. His middle school counselor told us:

If anybody would have or could have [made changes], Martin would have with that little boy. He really put out a lot of energy and time, but you can't make up for someone being beaten in the middle of the night by a drunk parent. They've got to go home . . . For a long time, the mentor seemed to make a connection, but the family disappeared.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the strong interest in expanding school-based mentoring, timely information on the potential of this type of mentoring should be useful to policymakers and program operators. Toward this goal, P/PV visited two exemplary programs chosen by BBBSA. We talked with parents, teachers, children and mentors to learn more about how these programs operate and the effects that they have on the children and the school.

Our visits to these programs led us to four conclusions about school-based mentoring:

- School-based mentoring programs reach volunteers and youth who would not participate in community-based mentoring programs.
- School staff provide information to BBBS staff to help create strong matches and closely supervise these matches.
- Mentoring in the school context can provide volunteers with support and enable them to act as educational advocates for youth.
- Strong relationships can develop within the school context and these relationships can make a difference in the lives of youth.

Several important issues remain to be addressed. First, the study suggests that school support is crucial for the success of school-based mentoring programs. How do agencies like BBBS forge strong relationships with schools? Ensuring that program staff are sensitive to the needs and structure of the school environment will be essential for agencies to succeed in these collaborations. Programs will also need to develop strategies to work with and garner support from schools that are not initially supportive. Other issues will also be important to examine. For example, which aspects of staff support are most important for the mentor's success? The current study has outlined a few possibilities to guide future research,

including school staff's provision of information about the child prior to creating the match, their updates on youth's progress and setbacks, and their relationship and communication with BBBS staff.

Second, an important component of the school-based programs we visited was the collaboration between the mentoring program and companies in the community. These collaborations streamlined recruitment, training and supervision. To expand its programs, BBBSA is developing innovative ways to involve corporations on a national level (e.g., the current collaboration with United Parcel Service in five BBBS sites). Continuing this kind of work will be important for the growth of school-based mentoring. Mentoring agencies should also consider developing recruitment strategies that utilize other resources, such as churches and other faith-based organizations. Tulsa's program will work with volunteer pools from two churches in the coming year.

Future research should continue to explore connections between mentoring agencies and corporations. What incentives do companies have for collaborating with agencies like BBBS? What practices on the part of the mentoring agency encourage and sustain these collaborations? How can collaborating corporations help to support the efforts of the mentoring agency? And most importantly, can school-based mentoring thrive without these corporate connections? Addressing this last question will be particularly important for new programs that are based in communities where strong links between corporations and schools and between the mentoring agency and corporations, are not yet developed.

Third, can the effects of school-based mentoring extend beyond the classroom and outlive the mentoring relationship? The results of this study suggest that school-based mentoring can make positive changes in the lives of youth. However, additional research will be needed to confirm these qualitative findings and determine more specific ways that school-based mentoring may benefit youth. It will also be important to outline the characteristics and qualities of school-based mentors and school-based agencies that affect these impacts.

Finally, although these programs have potential to make positive changes in children's lives, are they affordable? In 1995, P/PV estimated that a match in a traditional BBBS community-based program costs about \$1,000 per year; BBBSA currently estimates a cost of \$600 per year for each school-based match. Tulsa's program estimated a wider cost difference: about \$1,200 for a community-based match and \$480 for a school-based match. The lower cost of school-based matches is a result of many factors, including decreased recruitment and supervision efforts, which allows for larger caseloads. Determining the cost of school-based matches in programs that do not have strong collaborations with corporations and thus have to expend more effort on recruitment and supervision will be an important goal for future research.

The conclusions in this report are based on observations of two programs from which we collected invaluable information. It must be noted, however, that we spoke with only a small number of individuals who were, for the most part, extremely supportive of the programs. We did not speak with groups of individuals who may have unique views, such as uninvolved parents, unsupportive teachers, high-school-age mentors, or youth who had transitioned with their mentors to middle school. Also, the two programs we visited were chosen as two of the strongest BBBS school-based mentoring programs. Other less-established programs may not have formed the strong collaborations with schools and corporations that have helped these two programs to flourish.

Nevertheless, we are persuaded that involving youth in well-run school-based mentoring programs can be an effective way to address the needs of disadvantaged youth. School-based mentoring is an intervention that certainly warrants more attention. In the coming year, P/PV will follow up these qualitative impressions with a quantitative investigation of the changes in youth who are involved in these programs.

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Endnotes

1. In 1998, approximately 45,000 children were on the BBBS waiting list. The waiting period for an 11- to 12-year-old is about one and a half years.
2. Over the past four years, Tulsa's program has expanded from serving two children to serving 115 in 10 schools; North Florida's program has expanded from 62 matches in seven schools to 475 matches in 31 schools.
3. We conducted individual, semistructured inter views with BBBS staff and school personnel and held three small group discussions (three to 10 participants each) with youth, mentors and parents from each program. Prior to each group discussion, we administered a brief, written survey that included questions about the respondent's background (e.g., age, gender) and characteristics of the mentoring relationship (e.g., how long the match had been meeting). The survey also included 21 questions about how respondents felt the youth had benefitted from meeting with the mentor. The 16 mentors interviewed ranged in age from 19 to 67. Most were employed, in a wide range of occupations including accountant, real estate broker and magistrate judge. Two were retired, one was a homemaker and six were parents. The volunteers had been meeting with their current mentees for an average of 12.7 months, ranging from five to 30 months.
4. This lower cost is a result of many factors, including decreased recruitment and supervision efforts, which allows for larger caseloads.
5. In an ongoing study of five BBBS school- based programs, 45 percent of volunteers in the school-based programs were married; the BBBS national average for community-based volunteers is 33 percent (preliminary analyses elaborated in an upcoming BBBSA report under a United Parcel Service Grant).

6. In an ongoing study of five BBBS school-based programs, 72 percent of the volunteers are White; the national average for BBBS community-based volunteers is 81 percent.
7. In Tulsa, over 80 percent of the youth served in the school-based program are minorities, whereas only 28 percent of those served in their community-based program are minorities. These figures are comparable to those reported in an ongoing study of five school-based BBBS sites: about 60 percent of youth in these programs are minorities; about 40 percent of youth served nationally in BBBS community-based programs are minorities.
8. This is consistent with results from an ongoing study of five BBBS school-based programs. The mean age at match of children in these school-based programs is about 9.6 years; the average age of children at match in BBBS community-based programs is 12 years.
9. Many of these schools serve predominantly minority families with extremely high mobility rates (as high as 95 percent in two Tulsa schools) and very little PTA involvement. Many parents did not finish high school and many families are very large or live in a home with other families. Children are often from single-parent families and as many as 90 percent of the students in one Tulsa school receive free lunch.
10. To learn about the children who attend these schools, we met with school staff from three elementary and one middle school. We spoke with a total of four teachers, two principals, one vice principal and two guidance counselors. We also made informal visits to four additional schools in Jacksonville.
11. In an ongoing study of five BBBS school-based programs, 65 percent of the families being served receive public assistance; the BBBS national average for community-based families is 45 percent.
12. The waiting time for youth in school-based programs is substantially shorter than in most community-based programs: last year in North Florida, youth waited an average of under three months for a mentor in the school-based program.
13. In a national study of five school-based sites, about 31 percent of youth were from two-parent homes; the national average for BBBS community-based programs is under 8 percent.
14. BBBSA reports that the average caseload in BBBS school-based programs is about 75 for a full-time case manager.
15. In Tulsa, our discussion group consisted of seven mentors from one company—a situation where mentor networks come into play most clearly: "Volunteers see each other more often than they do in the community-based program. I may have four or five volunteers there at the same time, so they see each other at school and at work. Sometimes I'll get e-mail from Jackie and she'll say, 'Plus, Kelly wanted me to let you know . . .'" In North Florida, although the mentors who attended our focus group were not from one company, two mentors knew each other because they work with a pair of siblings who attend the same school.
16. All names have been changed to protect the respondents' identities.
17. In our youth discussion groups, we asked children who chose the activities they participated in with their mentor. All the children who responded to this question (five of the 12) indicated that they helped their mentor to choose these activities.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Jean Grossman for her guidance and contributions throughout the writing of this report; Jenny Berrien and Crystal Wyatt who helped conduct the interviews and focus groups; Tom Curtis and Joyce Corlett from BBBSA for their help in designing the study and their feedback during the production of the report; BBBS staff, especially Erin Edwards, Alaina Gray, Cecilia Patterson and Adrian Harris as well as the parents, mentors, children and school staff who participated in the study; Gary Walker and Karen Walker for their valuable feedback on early drafts of this report; Natalie Jaffe who edited the manuscript and provided many helpful suggestions; Audrey Walmsley who was responsible for final formatting; and Maxine Sherman who designed and produced the report. We would also like to thank the anonymous donor who provided funding for this project.

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