

SMART Program
Site-Based Mentoring Program for African-American Students in Low Performing
Schools

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In a study of North Carolina charter schools Bifulco and Ladd (2006) found that charter school families have tended to select schools with students more similar both racially and socioeconomically to their own children than students in prior traditional public school. As a result, charter schools have become more racially segregated than their traditional counter parts. Bifulco and Ladd (2006) concluded that the racial and class based sorting of students across charter schools in North Carolina has increased racial segregation, has contributed to the poor performance of charter schools and has widened the black-white test score gap.

Approximately thirty-five percent (35%) of North Carolina's charter schools were either designated low-performing or priority. Out of the nearly 100 charter schools, almost fifty-eight percent (58%) did not make adequate yearly progress (Malone & Davis, 2009). Malone & Davis (2009) reported that a consistent theme in North Carolina's charter school landscape is the extremes of academic performance among its charter schools; a large number of charter schools either rank among the bottom performers or the top performers. According to the Blue Ribbon Commission on Charter Schools (2008), thirty percent of North Carolina's charter schools are in the bottom two deciles of charter school performers, 50% of the nearly 100 schools scored at or below the median performance in 2006-2007, and 45% of the charter schools do not perform at or above the average performance of traditional public schools in their counties. Of the 33 schools designated as low-performing or priority, twenty-one (21) schools had Performance Composite Scores, from the state mandated assessment, of less than 50%.

Site based mentoring programs can offer school leaders of charter schools and traditional public schools new or different approaches to the problems of low performing schools and the emerging challenges that affect the academic achievement of African American students and their well-being. The **Student Mentoring, Achievement, and Reform Transitions (SMART)** mentoring program, has taken a broad developmental approach to mentoring that focuses on helping youth build their own capacity to succeed in education and in life. By empowering young people to make good decisions and set goals, the SMART program positively impacts:

- Academic achievement and attitudes towards school and education
- Social skills, knowledge, and motivation
- Alternatives to gang involvement and delinquency
- Family and peer relations
- Self-esteem and confidence

The SMART Program has, by design, improved the academics and reduced the social ills of high risk children in 4th to 8th grades in two public charter schools in Durham, North

Carolina. Durham County has the greatest concentration of charter schools in the state of North Carolina. The two schools currently participating in the SMART program, School A and School B, each have a 98% African-American student population. Both schools have been identified as “low performing” and “high priority” schools by the state of North Carolina, respectively, and both schools serve children who are predominantly from families of low socio-economic status, living in marginalized communities.

Data

The mentee outcomes in the first two years of the SMART mentoring program yielded some wonderful, unexpected, and immeasurable outcomes such as resiliency, decision making and leadership skills, high school, college, and career readiness, enhanced school and community connectedness, class participation, keen sense of self, integrity, and respect. It is the *measurable outcomes* that have made this school based mentoring program a worthwhile initiative for school leaders with similar demographics to consider.

**SMART Program Report Year 1
2007 - 2008**

In the first year of the SMART Mentoring Program there were 43 students from School A enrolled in the SMART Program in grades 4-7 (2007-2008). Forty-six percent of the participants were black males, forty-four percent were females, all of the participants (100%) were African-American. No 8th grade students were enrolled in the SMART Program the first year because they would have less than one year to participate before moving to the high school. The program officially started the second semester of the second due to program development, recruitment, and screening students and mentors. Thirty-three students attended the SMART Program regularly second semester, and fifteen students attended the four week SMART Summer Program 2008. Baseline data from semester one and the end of year data from semester 2 were collected on each enrollee. Students had to a summative grade of 73 to pass a core subject/class and students must receive a Level III or IV to pass the North Carolina End of Grade Test. To interpret the raw data attached, please note the Grading Scale and the level ranges for the End of Grade Test.

Grading Scale

- A: 94 – 100
- B: 87 – 93
- C: 80 – 86
- D: 73 – 79
- F: 66 – 72

End Of Grade Test – Math Achievement Level By Grade

Grade	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
3 rd	311-328	329-338	339-351	352-370
4 th	319-335	336-344	345-357	358-374
5 th	326-340	341-350	351-362	363-379
6 th	327-341	342-351	352-363	364-382
7 th	332-345	346-354	355-366	367-383
8 th	332-348	349-356	357-367	368-386

Summary Data

Table 1
Core Subject and EOG Pass Rate
 (N=43)

English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Math End of Grade Test	Reading End of Grade Test
93%	74%	63%	79%	25.4%	17.4%

Table 2
Improved and Sustained Academic Performance Rate by Core Subject
 (N=43)

English	Math	Science	Social Studies
58%	63%	58%	63%

Attendance

(N=43)

88% of SMART Students Improved Attendance

(38 Students had less unexcused absences Semester 2 than in Semester 1)

Table 3
Out of School Suspension
 (N=43)

Semester 1 (1 or more days of OSS)	Semester 2 (1 or more additional days of OSS)	Semester 2 Only (1 or more days of OSS)
28%	2% *	16% **

**11 students did not have any additional suspensions semester 2 (92% decrease in the number of repeat offenders)*

*** 7 different students had suspensions semester 2, but no suspensions semester 1*

The data was used to design the 2008 summer program with reading and math as an emphasis for the academic component. We started to see the positive impact the mentor/mentee relationship had on student performance, both academically and socially, during the summer. As the mentor/mentee’s relationship strengthened during the 2008-2009 academic year, a marked increase in the overall academic performance of the SMART students was documented early on in the school year and the school as a whole made growth. An overview of the SMART Program follows for school leaders interested in a school based mentoring program as a means to address student achievement, socialization, and parental involvement.

SMART Mentoring Program

The SMART Program is a federally funded site-based mentoring program sponsored by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools for three years, 2007-2010. The grant stipulates that 50 students and one low performing charter school from the Durham, North Carolina

area be added to the mentoring program each of the three years of the grant for a total of 150 students and three charter schools served over the three year period. The goals of the program are to:

- 1) drastically improve the academic achievement, self-confidence, and commitment to schools,
- 2) reduce and ultimately eliminate those social disorganization factors and delinquent behaviors of mentee participants that compromise their health, wellness, and future aspirations, and
- 3) provide the families of the mentee participants with the tools and skills they need to enhance learning in the home, empower their children to meet high academic standards, and provide effective guidance and support so that their children are better able to excel at accomplishing life and academic goals.

The SMART mentoring program is school-based and is designed to provide structured opportunities for mentors and mentees to interact and visit with one another after school, on the weekends, and during the summer; times when students are most at risk of delinquency. Mentors only meet with the mentees at school or during program sponsored activities or events, never independently outside school or scheduled program activities. The SMART Program mentoring model offers a supportive educational environment incorporating diverse and culturally appropriate learning methods for up to 150 mentees over the three years. Key components of the program are relationship building between caring mentors and high-needs children, academic tutoring, life skills training, college and career preparation for the 21st century and beyond, and parental involvement through workshops and planned events.

Program Design

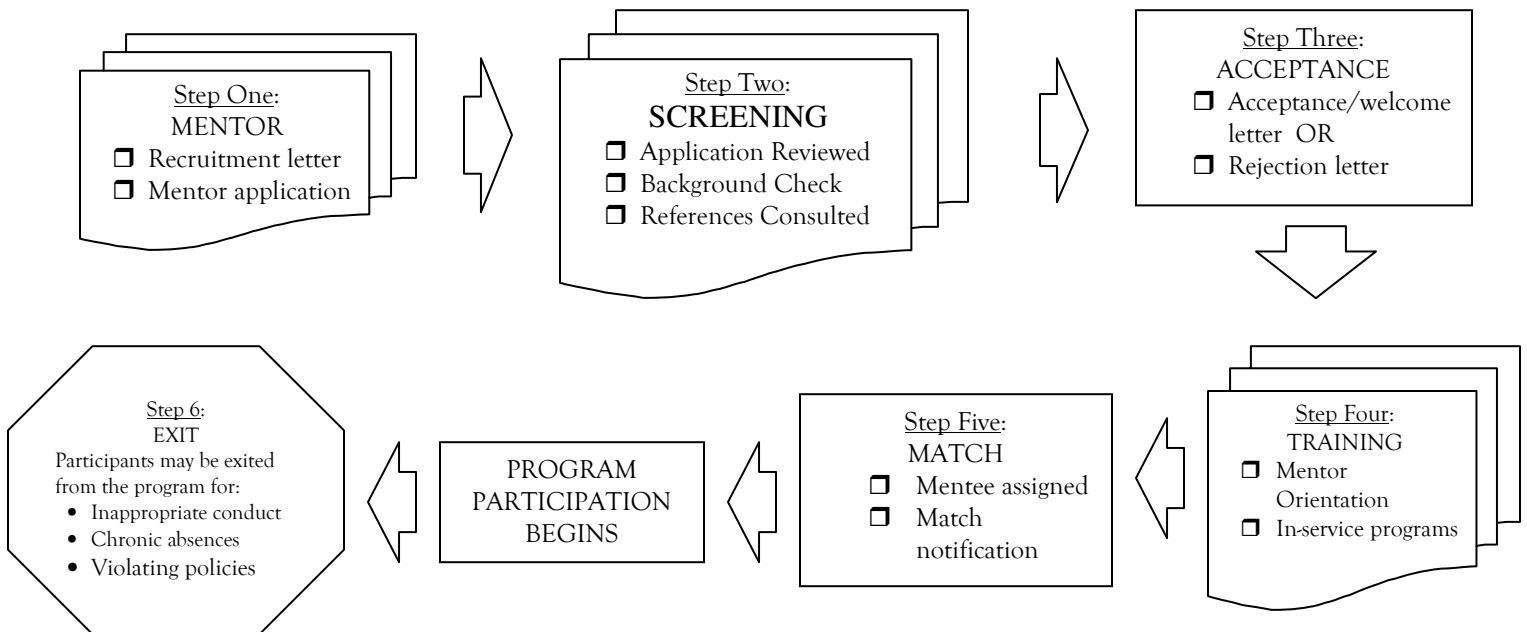
The SMART Program meets once a week after school for three hours during the school year, once or twice a month on the weekends or evenings for field trips or whole group program activities (for mentors, mentees, and families), and three to four weeks during the summer for a summer program. During these meeting times participants are involved in tutoring, parent workshops, trainings, life skills sessions, field trips, career development, learning non traditional sports, and there are opportunities for mentees to explore and develop their talents.

The mentees in the program have a *life skills* coach from Youth Development Initiative, a non profit organization out of Charlotte, North Carolina (www.ydiinc.org). The life skills coach provides 20 hours of services and training per year covering topics such as life skills (goal setting and personal planning), career research, entrepreneurship, personal economics, job readiness, and leadership through coordinating community service projects. During the summer mentees participate in the First Tee of the Triangle program which teaches life skills and its nine core values through golf – sportsmanship, honesty, integrity, respect, confidence, responsibility, courtesy, judgment, and perseverance (www.thefirstteetriangle.org).

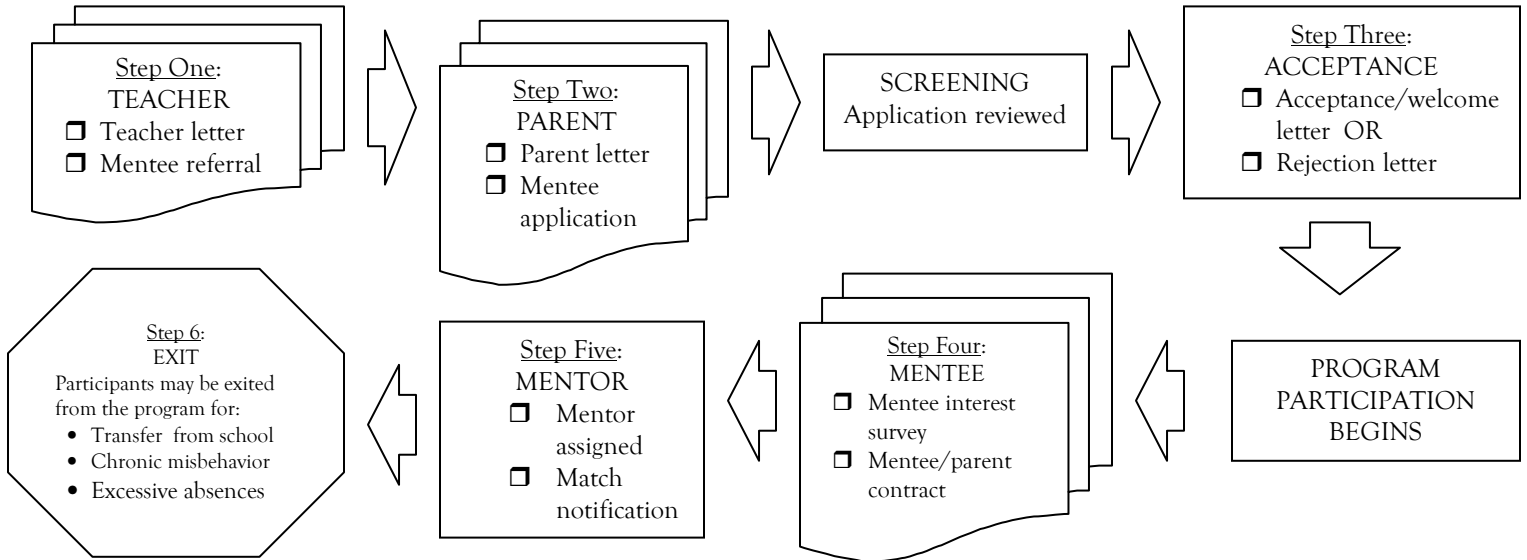
Mentee participants are able to *apply knowledge* and make real world connections to what they have learned in class by going on field trips to plays, colleges, science centers, museums, historical sites, and book stores to buy books for summer and holiday reading. *Tutorial sessions* incorporate technology, brain-friendly teaching and learning strategies, multiple intelligences, learning styles, and personality assessments to maximize long term academic retention and achievement. Community members come to the school site to expose students to different careers and give students the opportunity try to do the tasks required of people in diverse occupations such as a baker, lawyer, doctor, nurse, or teacher. SMART mentees also participate in the performing arts as well – tap, poetry, mime, drama, and dance – and present their creative art forms for school, family, and friends.

Mentors and Mentees

The role of the *mentor* is that of a friend, coach, motivator, advocate, and supporter. The mentor is expected to meet with the mentee four hours a month for a minimum of one year, take an interest in the positive growth and development of the mentee, and submit to a background check. The mentor is also expected make weekly contact with the mentee, attend SMART mentor trainings, and attend mentor/mentee activities, field trips, or after school academic sessions to satisfy the four hour monthly commitment. Mentors in the SMART Program have to be at least 18 years old and can come from all areas of the community – local businesses, religious institutions, government agencies, colleges, retirement centers, and civic organizations. Mentors (outside the school faculty) are recruited and go through an application process and screening process. They receive ongoing training and support throughout the mentor/mentee relationship and involvement with the SMART Program. Mentor training topics include the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, diverse learning styles, youth development, life and social skills, service learning, gang awareness, hip hop culture, and environmental influences.



The *mentees* are students in grades 4-8 who can benefit from the support of a mentor. These students have experienced academic challenges, low self-esteem, irregular attendance, inappropriate social skills, minimal parental support or involvement, negative role models, and/or low socio-economic conditions. Mentees go through referral, application, and screening process. Prospective mentees are referred by the teacher. Parents or guardians must give consent for mentee participation in the SMART Program. Mentees receive ongoing training and support throughout the mentor/mentee relationship and involvement with the SMART Program.



Parents participate in monthly workshops scheduled 75 minutes prior to each monthly PTA Meeting. Workshops are interactive and have cover topics including family communication skills building, solving math word problems, establishing literacy rich home environments for math and reading, goal setting and high expectations, balancing family and work, learning theory, and True Colors. Parents accompany mentees on field trips, celebratory events, and support student with school events.

Community Partnerships

According to the Mentoring Resource Center one of the keys to running a successful mentoring program is creating awareness in the community you serve. Strong community awareness leads to easier volunteer recruitment, more successful collaborations and partnerships, and improved program sustainability (Mentoring Resource Center, 2005). The success of the SMART Program is in part due to community partnerships which provide sponsorships, financial resources, educational activities, mentor volunteers, human capital for services, food, and educational materials. Church choirs and ministries, colleges and universities, fraternities and sororities, and site based school staff, are great places to start to get mentors for students.

Implications

In these economic times of budget cuts and budget constraints, school leaders of low performing schools must consider taking advantage of the social capital that is available to offset changing school demographics, staff cuts, and preparing students for 21st Century Skills – specifically Life and Career Skills and Learning and Innovation Skills. Site based mentoring provides such an opportunity. With increased accountability measures and growing pressure to increase student academic performance schools must look outside the perimeter of the school for ways to enrich the academic and social aspects of students' lives. Mentoring has proven to be one of the most effective ways of improving the academics and reducing the social ills that plague many of our high risk children such as low self-esteem and low confidence, inappropriate social skills, low socio-economic status, irregular attendance, gang influence, and minimal parent support (Herrera, 1999; Herrera, et al., 2007). In a landmark study by Big Brothers Big Sisters, mentored youth were: 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, and more likely to get along with their families and peers. Site based mentoring programs require very little school staff time and are amenable to serving students during the school day. Site based mentoring programs are relatively inexpensive to operate, easy for schools to adopt, and parents buy into site based mentoring programs (Herrera, et al., <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet3.pdf> 2007).

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