DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 463 UD 026 733

TITLE	At-Risk Youth and the Role of College and University Students.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO. Campus Compact.
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College School Cooperation; *College Students; Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *High Risk Students; *Mentors; Middle Schools; National Programs; Program Descriptions; *Student Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS	*Partnerships

ABSTRACT

Campus Partners in Learning (CPIL) encourages college and university students to act as mentors to middle school youth who are at risk of not completing a secondary education or making the transition to a productive adulthood. This national project, comprised of 202 colleges, offers information, technical assistance, and national visibility for campus-based mentoring initiatives. CPIL is part of Campus Compact, a project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) that promotes mentoring as an effective intervention strategy for at-risk youth. The most successful programs include the following components: (1) collaboration and communication between local or state agencies, higher education institutions, and elementary and secondary schools; (2) the financial and administrative support of the participating college or university; (3) comprehensive training and support for participating college students, including opportunities for reflection; and (4) program goals that include personal as well as academic growth for the at-risk youth. The following campus programs are described: (1) Boston University/Boston Public Schools Collaborative Mentor Program; (2) The Tripartite Mentor Program (Connecticut College); (3) CUNY/BOE Student Mentor Program (Hunter College, New York); (4) Spartan Buddies, Teams, and Pals (Michigan State University); (5) Penn Partners (University of Pennsylvania); and (6) Xavier University Peer Mentor Project (Xavier University of Louisiana). (FMW)

AT-RISK YOUTH AND THE ROLE OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

"Teachers can help at-risk children by making sure young people get good basic skills...more important however, is giving kids a sense of self-worth. Children need to feel good about themselves and they need a variety of ways to feel good. They need caring adults." -- Marion Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund

Campus Partners in Learning (CPIL), a project of Campus Compact, encourages college and university students to act as mentors to middle school youth at risk of not completing their secondary education or making the transition to a productive adulthood. This national project acts as a catalyst for action on campuses, offering information, technical assistance, and national visibility for campus-based mentoring initiatives. Campus Compact is a project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS); CPIL is part of a broader ECS effort to promote mentoring as an effective intervention strategy for youth at risk.

THE ISSUE

The increasing number of youth at risk has become an issue of critical concern to our nation. Statistics paint an alarming picture of today's young people:

* One in five American children lives in poverty (nearly half of black children).
* Seven in ten drop out of school in some U.S. cities.
* One in ten teenage girls becomes pregnant.
* U.S. teenagers rank number one in the world for drug abuse.

As many as 30% of the nation's youth are thought to be "at risk" in some way -- at risk of failing to get the education and skills they need to become productive adults, adults who will be personally happy and successful and who will contribute to the nation's future.

These young people represent all racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds, but a disproportionate number are from low income and minority backgrounds. Many are not "making it" in today's educational system and an unacceptable number do not graduate from high school.

Today's young people will become the mainstay of America's workforce tomorrow, and undertake the leadership of this country. America' future depends on their ability to participate as active, informed citizens. We cannot afford to let them fail or become disconnected from society. We need to help them achieve their potential. The issue is particularly distressing when dropout figures are considered.

According to a 1987 report by the General Accounting Office in Washington D.C., more than 14% of high school students do not reach graduation, one of the most alarming and rapidly increasing problems facing our society today. The figures are considerably higher among Hispanics, blacks and economically disadvantaged youth. For example, in the state of California, the dropout rate averages 30%. In Detroit, the attrition rate in public high schools reached 60% in 1987. Although dropout rates differ between urban and rural schools, and according to the ethnicity and economic status of the student population, the attrition rate for all students is on the rise. At the Institute for Educational Leadership, some researchers project that the national dropout rate will reach 40% by the year 2000. Recent studies indicate that a majority of these dropouts do not lack the academic ability to complete school; rather, they lack the necessary self-confidence and support. The number of dropouts is a problem of enormous proportions and continues to grow. As a national study documents, teenagers with the weakest reading and math skills by age 18 are eight times more likely to have children out of wedlock and four times as likely to be on welfare rather than employed.

These concerns are motivating educators, policymakers and a range of national organizations to address themselves to the future of America's youth with a renewed sense of urgency. What can be done?

At a 1987 National Forum on Youth at Risk, co-sponsored by the Education Commission of the States, participants identified five effective ways to help at-risk youth: mentoring, parental involvement, early childhood education, interagency and public/private collaboration, and restructuring of the schools. Efforts are currently being undertaken in each of these areas, by federal and state government agencies, major foundations, and national and local organizations. The growing number of high school dropouts directly affects both higher education institutions and the communities in which they are located. The Executive Committee of Campus Compact has decided to address the issue by encouraging and supporting campus-based mentoring programs. Such programs are a natural match between the needs of young people and the resources of universities. Mentoring programs provide at-risk youth with needed individual attention, while giving college students a structure to help, taking advantage of their own experiences and energy.

The need for one-on-one assistance to at-risk youth is clear. In an article titled "Mentors", Margaret Mahoney, President of the Commonwealth Fund, wrote:

> Several studies verify that achievers are influenced by specific people in their lives, far more than underachievers, that whether or not young people succeed depends in large part on individuals who help them establish values and who inspire effort...Youngsters lack and need the direct intervention in their lives of mature individuals who provide the one-to-one relationship that can reassure each child of his innate worth, instill values, guide curiosity and encourage a purposeful life. (1983 Annual Report, The Commonwealth Fund)

CURRENT CAMPUS EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE

A 1987 Campus Compact survey of campus-based, community service programs, along with the Compact's clearinghouse on public service programs, illustrates that almost all member schools have active service programs designed to help at-risk youth in their local communities. Such programs range from tutoring youth to summer camps, from food and clothing drives to coaching athletic teams. In a majority of these activities students are matched in a one-to-one relationship with youth. The most common structure for these relationships are Big Brothers/Big Sisters and tutoring programs. Survey responses indicate that most of these programs provide only one service for the youth. While monthly social activity, math tutoring and basketball coaching are all worthwhile endeavors, there is enormous potential to incorporate a mentoring component into these programs, which concentrates on the development of both academic skills and personal growth.

National studies document that a majority of potential dropouts have multiple problems, and effective programs must provide multiple services, including basic education, counseling, and assistance in obtaining social services. A 1987 General Accounting Office report, School Dropouts: Survey of Local Problems, found that personalized attention was one of the factors rated most critical to program success by school administrators. Individual attention, however, is nearly impossible in crowded classrooms. For example, a study of Chicago schools found that students receive less than ten minutes a day of individual attention from instructors. Student volunteers must be made aware of the needs of these youth for personal attention and be trained in preparation for their role as a mentor.

THE ROLE OF CAMPUS COMPACT: INCREASING THE IMPACT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

As Lee Levinson concluded in Community Service Programs (1986, National Association of Independent Schools), community service program structures within schools do not guarantee effective experiences. Contrasting "exposure programs" with "engagement programs," he found that while "service without engagement

prepares students to make things 'less bad,' it fails to help them make the connections that will lead to change." Engagement programs have explicit, detailed and comprehensive objectives, are unswerving in their commitment to service, are intellectually demanding, and allow time for reflection on social problems, social policies, and personal feelings about helping. Programs which engage students in relationships with at-risk youth, without being deliberate and well-planned mentoring programs, are not operating at their full potential -- for either the youth or the student volunteer.

The Compact's survey reveals that only 5% of responding schools offer any type of training for their student volunteers. Only two of the forty schools with Big Brother/Big Sister programs provide more than a brief orientation and manual. Survey responses also indicate a clear desire on the part of the schools for guidance and suggestions in setting up training. To make a real difference in the lives of these youth, the purpose of these programs must be extended beyond friendship or tutoring, into a developmental relationship, the goal of which is to help children increase their self-confidence and define a future for themselves. The greatest difference a one-on-one relationship can make for the youth involved is in attitude, self-esteem and motivation, rather than exclusive attention to academic matters. This idea is emphasized in Public/Private Ventures' report on Youth and the Workplace (1987). The report's first recommendation for at-risk youth programs is that they "explore ways to make programs more holistic, particularly ways to balance their academic and employment focus with human development enrichments." Because of the wide range of tutoring programs already operating on campuses, the Compact seeks not only to create new programs, but also to expand programs already in place. One approach is to add a comprehensive training component to assist student tutors in serving as mentors.

College and university students must be made aware of the potential of a mentoring relationship, and be given guidance in its development. While compassion, sensitivity and listening skills are important criteria for a mentor, they are just the beginning. As Margaret Mahoney wrote, "to create a corps of effective mentors we must provide them with techniques to help handle the strains that are inevitable as they try to launch adolescents into this demanding, competitive and sometimes dangerous world." As mentors and tutors, college students may often be confronted with many of the difficulties these youth face: physical and mental abuse, lack of familial support, limited English, drug and alcohol addiction, and pregnancy. Appropriate and prepared reaction and response is critical and requires training, the counsel of experts, and on-going support meetings. While college students cannot and should not be expected to be professional social workers, they must be prepared to respond to a multitude of situations. That preparation can and should vary according to the population involved and to the design and focus of the program. All students, however, should be provided with the following training and additional support:

1) An orientation which clearly outlines the goals of the program, and the expectations for student volunteers. Students must also be encouraged to share their reasons for participation, and their expectations for involvement.
2) An introduction to the community's culture and school district by a youth expert from the area, such as a middle school teacher or community agency director.
3) A lecture/discussion/workshop with a youth expert on child development and communication techniques.
4) Ongoing (bi-weekly or monthly) get-togethers for students to share their observations, frustrations, ideas and questions.
5) Scheduled program director/coordinator office hours so that students know there is time to ask questions, seek advice.
6) A referral list of youth-related community resources.

Training will provide students with the skills and confidence to be effective mentors. The workshops, lectures and group discussions covering such skills provide an ideal setting to draw on the expertise of faculty members and local youth experts. To ensure that specific community needs and issues will be addressed, collaboration of local resources is also essential during the planning of the training.

CAMPUS PARTNERS IN LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The connection between college students and youth at risk holds great promise. CPIL is designed to help campuses establish or expand programs which will create the most effective and rewarding connections possible by:

1) Serving as a **central information clearinghouse** for people seeking information on campus-based mentoring programs for at-risk youth. In this role, CPIL will continue to research campus-based mentoring programs, respond to inquiries from member schools as well as a broader audience, issue a bi-monthly newsletter, compile and distribute profiles of model programs, and produce a resource manual with information on setting up mentoring programs and training mentors.

2) **Providing technical and financial assistance** to member schools who are committed to developing or expanding mentoring programs. During CPIL's first year, Compact staff is working closely with ten focus group schools. These selected schools provide an ongoing way to gain first-hand experience about the components that affect the success, failure and impact of these programs. Beginning in January 1990, Campus Compact will provide $15,000 matching project development grants to member schools on a competitive basis.

3) **Promoting a national awareness of mentoring initiatives** to foster the development of effective campus-based mentoring programs. Campus Compact has undertaken a variety of educational and public relations efforts, including collaborating with ABC/PBS and Youth PLUS; sponsoring forums on mentoring at national conferences; and collaborating with national organizations involved with mentoring and other programs for youth.

In addition, **many of the 202 college presidents who comprise the Compact membership** support Compact efforts by:

1) Heightening awareness, through public speeches and editorials, of the at-risk youth issue and the role of higher education in sponsoring mentoring programs.

2) Providing financial and institutional resources to develop effective campus-based mentoring programs.

3) Creating post-secondary/secondary school partnerships by collaborating with representatives from local school districts.

4) Developing ways to link mentoring programs and volunteer training to the curriculum.

5) Recognizing current campus programs which serve at-risk youth, and creating incentives for greater student involvement.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Campus-based programs which help meet the needs of educationally at-risk youth vary in size, structure and emphasis. The most successful, however, include many or all of the following elements: collaboration and communication between local or state agencies, higher education institutions and elementary and secondary schools; the financial and administrative support of the participating college or university; comprehensive training and support for participating student, including opportunities for reflection; and program goals which include personal as well as academic growth for the youth.

In addition to the above, the structure of successful programs requires careful screening, thoughtful matching, a significant time commitment on the part of mentors, an orientation for both youth and mentors, supervision and monitoring of mentoring relationships, active involvement of parents and teachers, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the program.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS. "Boston University/Boston Public Schools Collaborative Mentor Program"

Boston University has collaborated with the Lewis School in Roxbury for several years; this year saw the addition of a mentor program in which 20 BU minority students each mentored a middle-schooler. The program is of particular interest for its community service component. Mentor/mentee pairs work together for a few hours each week either in a neighborhood retirement home, or a nearby day care center. In addition to focussing the relationship away from the child's "neediness" and on to his or her ability to help others, the community service project provides an initial context for the mentor/mentee relationship.
Pairs also meet informally once a month to pursue common interests--music, sports, computers--and, if mentees initiate it, to study together, though this program emphasizes friendship over a tutoring relationship. Mentors and mentees were matched by race and gender, and by interest where possible. The co-directors of the program felt that the more the children had in common with mentors outwardly, the easier it would be to establish a relationship, and the more likely the children could envision themselves in their mentors' shoes--as academic achievers and responsible adults--in the future. Mentors received training from an Urban League representative, who exposed them to the difficulties their mentees face growing up in a poor urban neighborhood: drug-trafficking, gangs, and in some cases living in one-parent or welfare families. He also broached discussion topics such as how minorities are perceived in the media, and how to discuss personal values with mentees without indoctrinating them. A small grant from a local organization, Teens as Community Resources, supported program activities such as providing pizza and t-shirts for program participants.

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE, NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT. "The Tripartite Mentor Program"

In 1988-89, the Connecticut College Mentor Program's 11 mentors worked with proteges from the Winthrop High Rise Housing Development. The program grew out of the Tripartite Tutoring Program and PALS, a program that matched adolescent girls with "big sister" college students, and it engages the guidance of the state dropout coordinator for the public school system. Mentors receive at least 21 hours of training based on a Life Options Program over the course of the year, in bi-weekly hour-long meetings and full day sessions twice a semester. In these sessions, often led by outside speakers, participants discuss such issues as drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, and teen pregnancy. The Tripartite Mentor Program is run on a democratic leadership principle: While two student coordinators work with the Director of the Office of Volunteers for Community Service to organize and support the program, mentors take turns leading group sessions in entertaining and instructive activities. Such activities have included improvisational skits around a theme, swimming, trust games, speakers from outside organizations, and a winter party. These activities take place during three-hour Monday night meetings. In addition to these meetings, mentors tutor proteges for two hours each week, and meet informally with proteges one-on-one for two hours each month.

HUNTER COLLEGE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK. "CUNY/BOE Student Mentor Program"

The Hunter College mentoring program is one of 14 such programs, centrally coordinated through the CUNY Student Mentor Program, a collaborative effort of the Board of Education of the City University of New York. Hunter College's mentoring program operates in conjunction with Julia Richman High School. It focuses on developing interpersonal skills and providing career guidance for high school students at risk of dropping out of school. At-risk students are identified by the high school's principal and faculty. Mentors meet with mentees for several hours a week, and attend a weekly training seminar at the college. The seminar focuses on the role of the mentor and on materials for enhancing students' skills and abilities, such as a career workbook. Mentors keep a logbook of meetings with mentees throughout the program. Mentoring positions are open for up to 20 students in good academic standing, and students receive three academic credits upon completion of the semester. Faculty salaries and program costs are paid for by Hunter College and The CUNY Student Mentor Program, funded by the New York State Legislature. Public/Private Ventures of Philadelphia evaluated the CUNY/BOE programs and published their results in September, 1988. It found that the programs collectively reached 4,273 students during the 1987-88 academic year.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN. "Spartan Buddies, Teams and Pals"

Michigan State participates in a variety of programs which match university students with at-risk youth in the Lansing area. When the Lansing Board of Education made youth at risk a priority concern in 1988, and drafted a plan for identification and early intervention, the campus Service-Learning Center created the Spartan mentoring program. The Spartan program is, in fact, three mentoring programs, each with slightly different activities, including developing good study habits and writing skills, learning to use leisure time constructively, and discussing life issues. Spartan Buddies are matched one-on-one with eight- to thirteen-year-olds whom they tutor once a week and meet recreationally once a week. Spartan Teams comprise a mentor, a ten- to thirteen-year-old, and a six- to nine-year-old, who meet to study together or to play in group recreation; the college volunteer acts as a role model for the older youth, who in turn learns to mentor the younger child. Spartan Pen Pals write weekly to individual youths or classrooms on topics of interest; these might include what college is like, or issues such as alcohol or drugs. The intention is to provide additional motivation to write, study, and to reinforce positive behavior and a desire to stay in school. At the end of the term, the Pals may visit the school or community site.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA. "Penn Partners"

The University of Pennsylvania, committed to increasing the number of underrepresented minority students entering careers in the health field, initiated the Penn Partners project. The project matches minority middle school students who are interested in the sciences with Penn students enrolled in a post baccalaureate pre-health program. Mentors establish ongoing relationships with students, meeting with them one-on-one, one Saturday a month, over a two year period. Activities include visits to labs, hospitals, and local museums, as well as group picnics and workshops. Student mentors are required to attend two two-hour training workshops. The first is led by a faculty member from the Graduate School of Education. The discussion covers power, control, issues of clarification (such as why students enter into the relationship), and helps students question the assumptions they may bring with them. The second session is lead by an expert in minority education. Topics include what it means to be a black student, ways to overcome the barrier of being a white mentor, limitations to the relationship, the role of honesty and the relationship these children to their families. Mentors also gather every two or three weeks to discuss, troubleshoot and share their experiences. Mentors are recognized through scholarship support for one of their courses each year. The Penn Partners program is a collaboration of: the university, which matches all outside funds received through direct subsidy of staff salaries, and provides operating costs for on-campus programs for youth and teachers and additional scholarships; local middle schools and dropout prevention/career exploration programs; and The Dupont Fund.

XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA. "Xavier University Peer Mentor Project"

The Xavier Project has been designed to provide middleschool students with a holistic view of the potential risks they will encounter during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The program has three components: on-campus tutoring (to expose the youth to higher education, and the mentoring program to other students), Big Buddy (off-campus, informal, group or independent interaction), and weekly informational workshops. The children participating attend an alternative school in New Orleans. The "Workshop Way" school provides an unstructured environment, operating on such principles as "It is intelligent to take a risk," "I don't have to learn everything today," "It is a right to have time to think," and "We respect the rights of others." Twenty Xavier students act as mentors to the entire sixth, seventh and eighth grades, three mentees to a mentor. Mentors are screened in an intensive one-hour interview to identify certain characteristics -- patience, caring, willingness to understand, acceptance and openness. Subsequently, they are trained by Xavier counseling and administrative staff, teachers and community representatives, who are familiar with the difficulties children face and how to alleviate them. During a get-acquainted session, mentors and students interview each other; they then develop goals for the relationship and form a binding contract. During the course of the semester, mentors and mentees meet twice weekly for individual tutoring, and once a week as a group to view and discuss videos on such themes as self-esteem, goal-setting, personal relationships, communication, health risk factors and personal health maintenance; mentors take turns facilitating discussions. Program activities enhance students' decision-making skills concerning such issues as substance abuse, conflict management, and early sexual activity.

As participants in the CPIL Focus Group of campuses developing mentoring programs, Boston University, Connecticut College, Michigan State University, and Xavier University each received a seed grant from Campus Compact for the 1988-89 school year. Funds were used to hire trainers and/or student coordinators, and for materials and other program costs.

CPIL is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Honeywell Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.