EVALUATION REPORT

Law Enforcement Mentoring Program: Examining the Impact on Student Performance and School-related Behavior

By Kathy Terry, Ph.D.

With a focus on assisting at-risk middle-school students in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to succeed in school and graduate from high school, HISD and several area law enforcement agencies partnered together to conduct the Law Enforcement Mentoring Program. The purpose of this report is to assess the impact of the law enforcement mentoring program on student academic achievement, attendance, and delinquent behaviors for HISD students. It was found that student participants in the sixth and seventh grade showed an improvement in their reading performance on the 2013 STAAR test; while eighth-grade mentees increased their 2013 STAAR mathematics test performance. Although the Stanford 10 results on the reading, mathematics, language, science, and social science subtests were slightly lower for students after one year in the mentoring program, these differences were not statistically significant from the prior year's results. However, the number of school days missed by students increased 44.2 percent and in-school and out-of school suspensions also increased.

Background

Role models have been found to play an important part in the lives of young people (Zirkel, 2002). Students with a caring adult in their lives are less likely to get involved in delinquent activities and more likely to experience academic gains (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). In a coordinated effort to provide at-risk students with a mentor, HISD sought law enforcement officer volunteers from the HISD, Metro, and Houston Police Departments to be a part of the Law Enforcement Mentoring Program.

Thirty-seven police officers volunteered to serve as mentors during the 2012–2013 school year. Officers participated in a training session on topics for discussion with their mentee and strategies to employ during group mentor sessions. Officers were assigned to mentor three to five students. Approximately, 122 students from eight participating HISD middle schools (Attucks, Cullen, Deady, Jackson, Key, McReynolds, Sugar Grove, and Welch) were mentored by police officers. Students were selected to participate in the mentoring program based on their past behavioral problems or life issues such as chronic truancy, gang-affiliation, having been in juvenile system, and/or having an incarcerated parent.

Data and Methods

A list of the volunteer mentors and their mentees was provided by the director of the Parent Engagement Department. Student demographic data were obtained using the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

Police mentors were asked to complete a brief online survey about their mentoring experiences. The Law Enforcement Mentoring Survey was stored online using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. The survey data were aggregated into Microsoft EXCEL databases and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate statistics. All statistics were based on the total number of valid responses and missing data were not included in calculating percentages or mean scores.

Student academic performance was reported using State of Texas Assessment of Academic Resources (STAAR) and Stanford 10 results from academic years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. Only students with two years of data were included in all analyses.

What are the demographics of the students mentored in the Law Enforcement Mentoring Program?

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the students mentored by a police officer during the 2012–2013 school year. Table 1 reveals that 77.0 percent of students were male. Fifty-nine of the students (48.4) were in the seventh grade, while 39 students (31.9 percent) were in the eighth grade and 24 (19.7 percent) were in the sixth grade. Approximately, 50.8 percent of the students were African-American and 30.3 percent were classified as receiving special education services. The majority of students in the mentoring program were classified as at-risk (77.0 percent) and as economically disadvantaged (92.6 percent).

What were the perceptions of law enforcement officers about their mentoring experiences?

The officer mentors were asked to complete an online survey about their experiences in the mentoring program. Fifty-seven percent (n = 21) of the mentors completed the survey. **Table 2** presents the results of survey respondents about program components.

Sixty percent of the officer mentors felt that the

Table 1. Demographics of Students Mentored by Law Enforcement Officers, 2013

	N	%
	122	100
Gender		
Male	94	77.0
Female	28	23.0
Grade		
Sixth	24	19.7
Seventh	59	48.4
Eighth	39	31.9
Ethnicity		
African American	62	50.8
Hispanic	56	45.9
Other	4	3.3
Special Education		
Yes	37	30.3
Limited English Proficiency		
Yes	26	21.3
Economically Disadvantaged		
Yes	113	92.6
At-Risk		
Yes	94	77.0

Table 2. Survey Rating Responses of Officer Mentors about Program Components

Component	Needs Improve-ment	Okay	Very Good	Excellent
Training	20.0	20.0	55.0	5.0
Materials/ Resources	15.0	30.0	35.0	20.0
Information about your mentee assignment	21.1	15.8	52.6	10.5
Communication from district administrators	10.0	25.0	40.0	25.0
Communication from school personnel	50.0	30.0	10.0	10.0
Space for mentoring session	21.1	31.6	47.4	0.0
Welcome by school	30.0	15.0	35.0	20.0

training they received was "very good" or "excellent", while 20.0 percent felt the training "needed improvement." In addition, 55.0 percent felt the materials and resources provided were "very good" or "excellent." Space was also allotted for additional comments about the training and materials. Some specific responses regarding the training and materials were as follows:

- Training, along with the materials, was beneficial.
- The tools received helped me have conversations with the children. However, sometimes, they wanted to talk about some other topic and we would.
- It would be more beneficial to have a monthly curriculum with specific lesson plans or activities that can be completed during the mentor session.

A majority of mentors (52.6 percent) felt the information they received about their mentees were "very good." Several respondents commented that the students participating in the program resented being placed in the program and their attitudes hindered the mentoring process. Specific responses included:

- Most of the kids don't want to be there and/or have an overall disinterest. I think the program has more to offer students who are participating voluntarily and not just students who are gang members and don't want to participate in the program.
- I have done this type of program with HISD before. This time, it seems that the students chosen are in desperate need of mentoring. However, I have also noticed that they do not

like the fact they were "selected" for this program. It has been difficult, to say the least, to present the program in a positive light for them. They see it as a disciplinary process. Therefore, it is more difficult to connect with them.

Mentor respondents noted that the communication from school personnel needed improvement (50.0 percent), while 40.0 percent responded that the communication from the district administrators was "very good." In the comments section provided, five mentors noted that there was a greater need for interaction with school personnel. Three officers mentioned that they never met the principal of the campus and the meeting location for their sessions was changed multiple times throughout the school year (n = 2).

Did the students in the mentoring program during the 2012–2013 school year have an increase in academic performance?
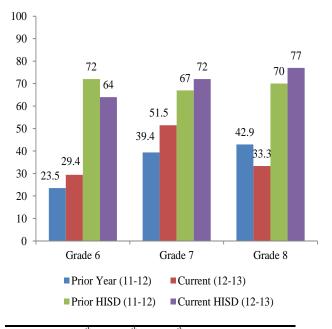
Figure 1 shows the percent of students who met satisfactory under phase-in 1 standards for school years 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 on the STAAR reading test by current grade level for students with two years of data. The 2011–2012 test results represent the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade data for 2012–2013 mentees in grades six, seven, and eight, respectively. Prior year and current year HISD results are provided for reference.

From spring 2012 to spring 2013, the percent of 2012–2013 sixth-grade mentees who met satisfactory performance under phase-in 1 standards increased from 23.5 percent the prior year to 29.4 percent on the reading STAAR test. Similarly, the percent of 2012–2013 mentees in seventh grade meeting the satisfactory phase-in 1 standards increased their scores from 39.4 percent to 51.5 percent. However, on the reading STAAR test, the percent of eighth grade mentees meeting the satisfactory performance standard decreased from 42.9 percent the prior year to 33.3 percent in 2013. Program students in all grades performed below the district results in their same grade level.

Figure 2 displays the percent of students who met satisfactory under phase-in 1 standards for spring 2012 and spring 2013 on the STAAR mathematics test by current grade level for students with two years of data.
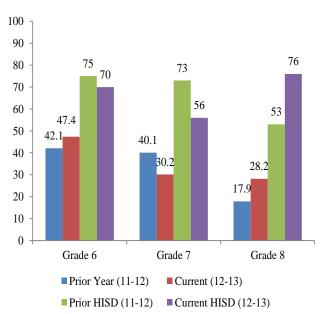
On the STAAR math test, the percent of mentees who met satisfactory performance under phase-in 1 standards increased from 2012 to 2013 for 2012–2013 sixth grade (42.1 to 47.4) and eighth-grade mentees (17.9 to 28.2). The percent of seventh-grade mentees meeting the satisfactory standards on the test decreased from 40.1 percent to 30.2 percent. Similar-

Figure 1. Percent Met Satisfactory at Phase-in 1 Standards for Law Enforcement Program Mentees, STAAR Reading, Current Year (Spring 2013) Compared to Their Prior Year Performance

Note: Grades 6th n=17, 7th n=33, 8th n=42
Source: Data Warehouse

Figure 2. Percent Met Satisfactory at Phase-in 1 Standards for Law Enforcement Program Mentees, STAAR Math, Current Year (Spring 2013) Compared to Their Prior Year Performance

Note: Grades 6th n=19, 7th n=32, 8th n=39
Source: Data Warehouse

Table 3. Law Enforcement Program Mentees Stanford 10 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs), 2012 and 2013

2013 Grade Level	N Tested	Reading		Mathematics		Language		Science		Social Science	
		2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
6	16	27	23	33	36	27	26	42	29	30	28
7	44	23	22	35	32	27	23	32	29	28	26
8	30	33	33	42	39	31	29	40	42	34	34
Total	**90**	**28**	**26**	**37**	**36**	**28**	**26**	**38**	**33**	**31**	**29**
District	**35,087**	**47**	**45**	**55**	**55**	**49**	**47**	**57**	**55**	**48**	**48**

Sources: Stanford data files 2012 and 2013

Note: District data include all students tested in 2011–2012 and all students tested in 2012–2013.

ly to the STAAR reading results, law enforcement program mentees performed below the district results in 2011–2012 and 2012–2013.

Table 3 presents the 2012 and 2013 Stanford 10 results on the reading, mathematics, language, science, and social science subtests for mentees by grade level with two years of data. Stanford 10 results are reported in normal curve equivalents (NCEs).

From spring 2012 to spring 2013, the total mean NCEs (all grade levels combined) earned by mentees decreased for the reading, mathematics, language, science, and social science subtests. Sixth grade mentees earned a higher mean NCE on the mathematics subtest from 2012 to 2013 (33 NCEs vs. 36 NCEs) and eighth-grade mentees earned a higher mean NCE on the science subtest during the same time period (40 NCEs vs. 42 NCEs). Paired sample t-tests did not reveal any statistically significant differences across all subtests from spring 2012 to spring 2013.

Did participation in the law enforcement program influence mentee school behavior (attendance, discipline)?

In order to assess changes in school behavior of mentees, attendance and discipline records were gathered for 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. **Table 4** displays the changes in attendance for 117 mentees that were found in the attendance files in 2012 and 2013. The total number of school days missed by mentees increased from 1,878 in 2011–2012 to 2,708 in 2012–2013. The average number of days absent per mentee also increased from 16.1 days to 23.2 days. This resulted in a decrease in the overall attendance rates by 5.2 percent.
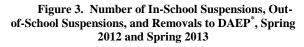
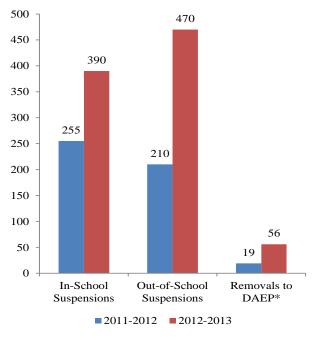**Table 4. Attendance Rates for Law Enforcement Program Mentees, 2012 and 2013**

	2012	2013	Change
Total Days Absent	1,878	2,708	+830
Average Days Absent	16.1	23.2	+7.1
Attendance Rate	89.9	84.7	-5.2

Sources: Attendance Files, 2012 and 2013

Figure 3 shows the number of in-school suspensions, out-of school suspensions, and removals to a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) for 2012–2013 law enforcement mentees for 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. A total of 86 students were found in the disciplinary file in both school years.

The number of in-school suspensions increased from 255 in 2011–2012 to 390 in 2012–2013 and the out-of-school suspensions also increased from 210 to 470. The number of mentees that were removed from their campus and placed in a DAEP increased by 37 students, from 19 students in 2012 and 56 students in 2013.

Figure 3. Number of In-School Suspensions, Out-of-School Suspensions, and Removals to DAEP[*], Spring 2012 and Spring 2013

Note: *DAEP=Disciplinary Alternative Education Program
Sources: Discipline Files, 2012 and 2013

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the lack of random assignment of students in the mentoring program. The selection criteria of program participants was based on the past negative behavioral issues of the student. Several mentors noted that some of their students were disinterested and withdrawn during the sessions.

Another limitation of this study is that the level of participation of student mentees was not considered for this report. Incorporating the program attendance of mentees may show that students that attended more mentoring sessions had more academic gains and better school behaviors than those who attended fewer sessions. This is a factor to be considered in future reports of the program.

Conclusions

This first examination of the impact of the Law Enforcement Mentoring program on student outcomes provides a foundation for program development and improvements. In general, the officer mentors noted that they enjoyed working with their mentees. Approximately, 50 percent responded that they planned to volunteer during the upcoming school year and 95 percent said they would recommend other officers to participate in the program.

Based on the survey responses from officer mentors, it is recommended that program administrators consider developing a step-by-step curriculum guide for mentoring sessions. Despite the training provided to officers, several mentors noted that they had changed the discussions in their sessions to adjust to the moods and interests of their students. Consistency in the delivery of the program curriculum may result in program benefits on student achievement and school behaviors.

It is also recommended that the program administrators develop new methods to attract at-risk students to the mentoring program. The current method of school principal selection based on past behavior resulted in several students resenting having to participate in the program. If school personnel can develop a way to attract students but still let them have some control of their participation, students may experience benefits from being a part of the mentoring program.

The information gained from this report can be utilized to guide HISD program administrators as they work to improve and sustain the law enforcement mentoring program. Future examinations of the program may yield positive outcomes for at-risk students who continually need assistance to make better life choices and succeed in school and beyond.

References

Lampley, J. and Johnson, K. (2010). Mentoring at-risk youth: Improving academic achievement in middle school students. *Nonpartisan Education Review, 6,* 1-12.

Zirkel, S. (2002). Is there a place for me? Role models and academic identity among white students and students of color. *Teacher College Record. 104*, 357-376.

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