



# The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring



A report for MENTOR:  
The National Mentoring Partnership

January 2014

By Civic Enterprises in association with  
Hart Research Associates

Mary Bruce and John Bridgeland

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### A Report By

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**MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership** is the unifying champion for quality youth mentoring in the United States. MENTOR's mission is to close the "mentoring gap" and ensure our nation's young people have the support they need through quality mentoring relationships to succeed at home, school, and ultimately, work. To achieve this, MENTOR collaborates with its *Mentoring Partnership Network* and works to drive the investment of time and money into high impact mentoring programs and advance quality mentoring through the development and delivery of standards, cutting-edge research and state-of-the-art tools. Learn more at [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org).

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# Open Letter to the American People

**A**s we work to improve life outcomes for young people, their voices must guide our efforts. The report that follows includes the results of the first-ever, nationally representative survey of young people's perspectives on mentoring. Core to our collective work is the fundamental belief that children and adolescents should receive the supports they need and deserve — including consistent and caring relationships with adults. By asking 18- to 21-year-olds across the country to share their opinions on and experiences with mentoring, they shared their realities with us: while the mentoring needs of our young people are not being fully met, for those with quality mentors, there is a powerful effect on their life trajectory.

The consistent, enduring presence of a caring adult in a young person's life can be the difference between staying in school or dropping out, making healthy decisions or engaging in risky behaviors, and realizing one's potential or failing to achieve one's dreams. Mentors can make a profound difference in the lives of their mentees — and in turn, strengthen our communities, economy, and country. The stakes are high, and we are encouraged to find that young people's experiences with different types of mentoring relationships provide powerful and complementary benefits. Young people with mentors, especially at-risk youth, have more positive visions of themselves and their futures, and they also achieve more positive outcomes in school, the workplace, and their communities.

While many young people benefit from mentoring relationships, the fact that more than one in three young people told us they had never had a mentor exposes the frays in our community fabric. As a society, too often we leave these mentoring relationships — powerful human connections — to chance. We must close this “mentoring gap” — for the good of young people and our country.



**Willem Kooyker**  
Board Chair, MENTOR

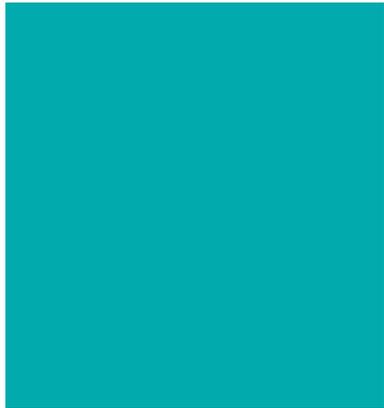
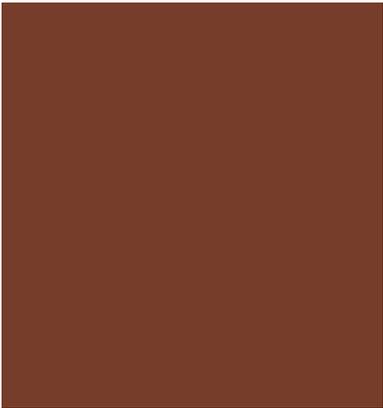
Facing this mentoring gap, and reflecting on the progress made in the mentoring movement, we are not discouraged. We are emboldened. Our nation is committed to advancing opportunities for young people. Where a child starts in life cannot determine how far he or she climbs. Equipped with this new data to inform our collective work, we must adapt our approach accordingly and attract new partners and advocates to close the mentoring gap. Young people deserve quality mentoring relationships that will allow them to more completely realize their full potential. In many regards, we are well on our way. One recent study showed that every dollar invested in quality youth mentoring programs yields a \$3 return in benefits to society at a minimum.

Since the founding of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership more than 20 years ago, the number of structured mentoring relationships for at-risk youth in the United States has increased from an estimated 300,000 to 4.5 million. Quality program practices have been codified through *The Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, and our national network of locally-based *Mentoring Partnerships* serves a unique role as a clearinghouse for resources to thousands of program providers across the country informed by a growing body of research. Ultimately, our mission is to advance the dedicated efforts of local and national organizations, and the millions of Americans who step up as mentors to deliver on the promise of mentoring.

The research base is strong, the need is clear, and the field is ready. We know now, more than ever, that we can meet many needs of young people through the support of caring adults and continued collaborative efforts of schools, businesses, community organizations, government, philanthropy, and young people themselves. Now, with this national survey, young people's powerful voices can help ensure the fate of America and its next generation are not left to chance.



**David Shapiro**  
President and CEO, MENTOR



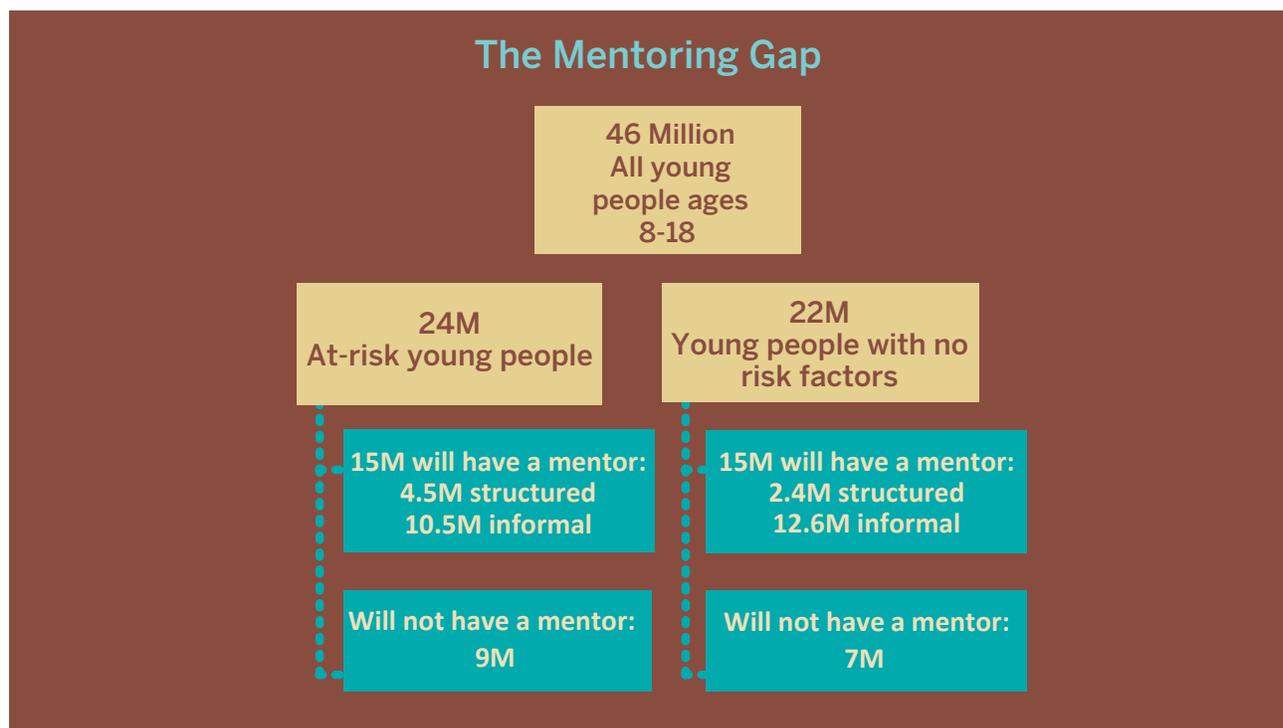
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**his report shares the findings from the first nationally representative survey of young people's perspectives on mentoring. While mentoring is needed and wanted by young people to help them stay on the path to high school graduation, college success, and productive adulthood, a significant mentoring gap exists in America, especially for at-risk youth. More than one in three young people — an estimated 16 million — never had an adult mentor of *any kind* (structured or “naturally occurring”) while they were growing up.\* This population includes an estimated nine million at-risk youth who will reach age 19 without ever having a mentor — and who are therefore less likely to graduate high school, go on to college, and lead healthy and productive lives. The survey also revealed a difficult paradox that the more risk factors a young person has, the less likely he or she is to have a naturally occurring mentor.

There is also good news. Encouragingly, young people confirmed and deepened our understanding of what

research tells us: structured and naturally occurring mentoring relationships have powerful effects which provide young people with positive and complementary benefits in a variety of personal, academic, and professional factors.

While a significant mentoring gap exists for at-risk youth, the survey also found that the more risk factors a young person has, the more likely he or she is to have a structured mentor, indicating a positive trend toward closing the mentoring gap for those most in need. The survey also revealed key leverage points where mentoring can better support young people, including by using structured mentoring as an intervention strategy to meet the needs of youth most at-risk. In the absence of naturally occurring mentoring relationships, structured relationships can help young people stay on or return to a successful path when they may falter, and help them achieve key milestones on the path to adulthood, such as high school graduation and college completion.



\*By applying the survey results to the U.S. Census demographics for 8 to 18 year olds, researchers provided projected estimates of the mentoring experiences for this cohort of 46 million young people.



**This report provides insights on young people's perspectives on mentoring in three areas:**

**(1) Mentoring's Connection to Aspirations and Outcomes; (2) The Value of Mentors; and**

**(3) The Availability of Mentors.** The report then offers recommendations to guide community, state, and national partners in their work to close the mentoring gap and increase the powerful effects of mentoring. By connecting young people to caring, consistent, and supportive adults, the nation can help young people achieve their dreams, and also strengthen communities, the economy, and our country. In addition to the nationally representative survey of 18- to 21-year-olds, this report reflects discussions with key leaders in business, philanthropy, government, and education, and a literature and landscape review of the mentoring field. While the field of mentoring has reported service gaps in the past, the estimates in this report are not meant to provide a direct comparison. Instead, they are meant to form the most accurate picture possible of how the mentoring needs of young people are currently being met through their perspective, highlight gaps that remain, and chart paths forward to create more caring adult relationships in the lives of children.

### **INSIGHT AREA 1: Mentoring's Connection to Aspirations and Outcomes**

Mentoring helps young people, especially at-risk youth, succeed in school, work, and life. A strong research base supports the efficacy of quality mentoring, including

a recent meta-analysis of more than 73 independent mentoring programs that found positive outcomes across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic areas of youth development. In our survey, we find evidence to suggest that young people's experience confirms this: youth with mentors are more likely to report engaging in positive behavior.

**Young people who had mentors report setting higher educational goals and are more likely to attend college than those without mentors. High expectations and higher educational attainment are key factors in life success.**

- More than three quarters (76 percent) of at-risk young adults who had a mentor aspire to enroll in and graduate from college versus half (56 percent) of at-risk young adults who had no mentor.
- At-risk young adults with mentors are also more likely to be enrolled in college than those without a mentor (45 percent of all at-risk youth with a mentor are enrolled in some type of postsecondary education as opposed to 29 percent of at-risk youth who are enrolled but never had a mentor).

**Young adults who had mentors, particularly those at-risk, are more likely to report engaging in productive and beneficial activities than youth without a mentor.** These activities translate into the higher self-esteem and self-confidence that are necessary traits for youth to engage in teamwork and community work, and to be successful in life.

- At-risk young adults with a mentor are more likely to report participating regularly in sports or extracurricular activities (67 percent of at-risk youth with mentors compared to 37 percent of those without them).
- At-risk young adults with a mentor are more likely to hold a leadership position in a club, sports team, school council, or another group (51 percent versus 22).
- At-risk young adults with a mentor are more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities (48 percent versus 27).

## Having had a mentor is correlated with engaging in more positive activities for at-risk youth.



\* At-risk youth surveyed who had a mentor = 32% of all young adults; at-risk who did not have a mentor = 20% of all young adults

**The longer the mentoring relationship lasts, the greater the value for youth.** The survey confirmed that the length of a mentoring relationship matters, both in structured and informal mentoring relationships.

- Youth satisfaction in mentoring relationships doubled when comparing relationships of more than a year to less than a year (67 percent of young adults found their structured mentoring relationship very helpful if it lasted for a year or more versus 33 percent when the relationship lasted less than a year), confirming the notion that longer relationships are stronger relationships.
- Young people with longer mentoring relationships report better outcomes than youth with shorter mentoring relationships in areas such as higher educational aspirations (86 percent of young adults in relationships of more than a year versus 77 percent of those in relationships of a year or less always planned to enroll in and graduate from

college), sports participation (77 percent versus 70 percent), leadership positions (61 percent versus 50 percent), and regular volunteering (61 percent versus 53 percent).

### INSIGHT AREA 2: The Value of Mentors

**Young adults value mentoring relationships.** The survey shows that young people also believe mentoring provides them with the support and guidance they need to lead productive lives.

- **Young adults who had mentors speak highly of these relationships.** They offer that their mentors help them stay on track in school, make good choices, and provide consistent support.
- Nearly all young adults who had formal mentoring relationships (95 percent) found these experiences to be “helpful,” including more than half (51 percent) who found the relationship to be “very

helpful.” Similarly, nearly all youth in informal mentoring relationships (99 percent) say their experience was “helpful,” including seven in 10 (69 percent) reporting it as “very helpful.”

#### **Informal and structured mentoring relationships can provide complementary benefits.**

- **Structured mentoring relationships tend to provide more academic support.** Youth report that formal mentoring programs provide a variety of benefits, and most commonly offer that they receive advice about school and get help with school issues and/or schoolwork. They also reference to a lesser degree receiving help to address life problems including assistance in getting a job, choosing a career, and getting into college.
- **Informal mentoring relationships tend to support personal development.** Mentees in informal mentoring relationships commonly offer that their mentors provided developmental, more than academic, support. These mentors conveyed advice and encouragement to help them make good decisions, and taught young adults how to

make the right decisions, follow the right path, and stay motivated.

#### **Mentees want to serve as mentors, indicating both an endorsement of mentoring and a powerful proof point that mentees are empowered to contribute to the world around them.**

- Nearly nine in ten respondents who were mentored report they are interested in becoming mentors (86 percent of all youth who were mentored, and 85 percent of at-risk youth who were mentored). In addition to confirming the value of mentoring, this desire to become a mentor also strengthens the earlier finding that mentoring is linked with higher rates of leadership and volunteering and offers a pool of future mentors to be activated.

### **INSIGHT AREA 3: The Availability of Mentors**

A mentoring gap exists that the nation must close. The research demonstrates — and young people agree — that mentoring relationships support personal and academic outcomes, regardless of a young person’s background, as well as help prepare young people for the future workforce. As at-risk youth are simultaneously more likely to have academic struggles and less likely to have naturally occurring mentors, their immediate mentoring needs could be met through formal mentoring programs. While the field of mentoring has grown significantly in recent years, millions of young people — especially those who could most benefit from a mentor — still do not have a supportive adult in their life.

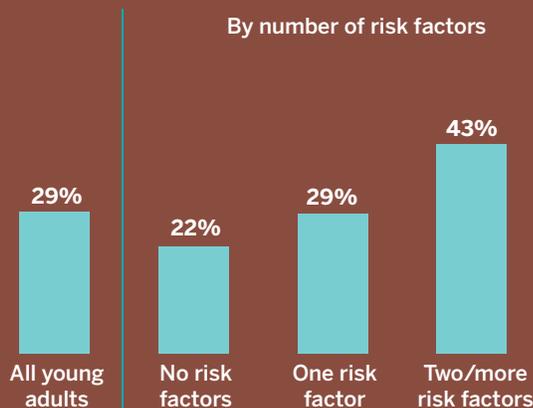
#### **One in three young people do not have a mentor.**

The rates are even higher for at-risk youth, likely the result of compounding risk factors including poverty, limited networks, schools with large proportions of high-needs students, and under-resourced communities.



## The more risk factors a youth has, the more likely they are to say they wished they had a mentor.

I recall a time between ages eight and 18 when I did not have an adult mentor but wished I had one to whom I could turn for guidance and support:



In our survey, one in three young people overall (34 percent) and even more at-risk youth (37 percent) report they never had an adult mentor *of any kind* (naturally occurring or structured) while they were growing up

- **Nationwide, that means today approximately 16 million youth, including nine million at-risk youth, will reach age 19 without ever having a mentor.**
- Encouragingly, an estimated 4.5 million young people are in structured mentoring relationships today, an increase from the estimate of 300,000 from the early 1990s.

**At-risk youth are less likely to have mentors and more likely to want one.** They understand the value of mentoring and report having wanted a mentor at higher rates.

- At-risk youth are also much less likely to report having had a naturally occurring mentoring relationship (57 percent of at-risk youth had a naturally occurring mentor versus 67 percent of those not at risk).

- At-risk youth are more likely to want a mentor. As young adults, these youth are more likely to recall a time growing up when they did not have a mentor but wish they had had one (29 percent of all youth versus 37 percent of all at-risk youth).

**The mentoring needs of youth who demonstrate the early signs of falling off track to graduate are not being fully met.** A powerful research base shows that attendance, behavior, and course performance in reading and math (“the ABCs”) are highly predictive of a student’s likelihood to graduate from high school, and that early interventions can get students back on track — while saving schools money. Mentoring can be a powerful early intervention, and more students with these risk factors could benefit from getting the preventive mentoring support they need.

- While there are mentoring gaps at all levels, the gaps are larger in students’ earlier years. Two-thirds (66 percent) of at-risk young adults do not recall having a formal mentor in elementary school while just over half do not recall having one in middle school or high school (57 percent and 56 percent,



respectively). Mentoring could have powerful effects if leveraged as an intervention earlier in life.

- Youth who struggled with attendance, behavior, and course performance are 10 percentage points less likely to have an informal mentor than those without these risks (56 percent versus 66 percent). While these youth are more likely to have a structured mentor than youth without these risk factors (21 percent versus 11 percent), four in five (80 percent) youth with these off-track indicators do not have a structured mentor.

## Paths Forward

Governments, businesses, nonprofits, and young people endorse and value mentoring as an important asset in a young person's life. Yet in America today, too many young people — including nearly nine million at-risk youth — do not have access to a mentoring relationship. While the mentoring field has expanded and gained incredible momentum in the last 20 years, more must be done to meet the needs that young people have defined.

The recommendations in this report, guided by the voices of young people, provide paths forward to build a society where all young people have access to a

quality mentoring relationship and receive the adult supports they need to succeed in school, work, and life. Mentoring can, and should, be integrated into holistic approaches to drive achievement and increase opportunity at school and home, and in the workforce. With the youth endorsement of mentoring, champions across multiple sectors, an expanding research base, and the dedicated efforts of the field, the mentoring gap can be closed — with benefits to young people, their communities, and our country.

- **Utilize mentoring to address national challenges.** At the local, state and national levels, mentoring should be leveraged as a key tool to address the pressing issues facing the next generation. When integrated into national initiatives, mentoring strengthens efforts to reduce poverty, truancy, drug abuse and violence, and promote healthy decision-making, positive behaviors, and strong futures. Already, mentoring has been connected to core outcomes for our country's youth, including educational attainment, poverty alleviation, and youth violence prevention through initiatives such as Grad Nation and Opportunity Nation.

When quality mentoring is integrated with other research-based reforms and interventions, high school dropout rates fall, college completion rates rise, economic mobility increases, and ultimately, the economy is stronger from an increase in productive workers. In addition to more intentionally integrating mentoring in efforts that address our nation's most pressing problems, the successes of mentoring and the commitments of foundations and agencies that support mentoring should also be celebrated. For example, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's *American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen* initiative and NBC's Education Nation have already included mentoring in their programming. Likewise, the Corporation for National and Community Service, Harvard School of Public Health, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, United Way

Worldwide, and MENTOR collaborate to promote mentoring throughout January, which is National Mentoring Month. These initiatives should be celebrated and expanded.

- Ensure that young people most in need have a quality mentoring relationship.** A mentor provides critical guidance to a young person on his or her path toward productive adulthood, and these important relationships should not be left to chance. Stakeholders from across the sectors should develop or strengthen systems that identify the children most in need of a mentor, determine their mentoring needs, and match them with quality mentors and wraparound services that can meet those needs. This intentional relationship building could dramatically improve the lives of children, the culture of schools, and the fabric of communities. In addition to meeting children's needs, these targeted interventions could lower costs and improve outcomes. Children who could most benefit from a mentor, but are least likely to have one, should be prioritized (including children of incarcerated parents, youth in foster care, or young people with other risk factors that jeopardize their path toward high school, college, career, and life success). At the local systems level, we should look to replicate models such as NYC Success Mentors where structured, targeted, and integrated mentoring support for students has helped reclaim thousands of school days. And at the national policy level, efforts that once provided mentors to 100,000 of the more than two million children with an incarcerated parent should be reinstated and scaled, and Congress should pass the Foster Care Mentoring Act (last introduced in the 112th Congress in 2011-2012), which looked to provide a much needed sense of permanency and support to young people facing some of the most challenging and frequent transitions. Quality mentoring can also help address early warning indicators of potential dropout, keep students on track and save schools' precious educational dollars in comparison to more costly dropout

recovery strategies enacted later in young people's development.

- Expand local, state and federal public policies that advance quality mentoring.** Public policies at the local, state, and federal levels can be expanded to advance quality mentoring.

### Local and State Policies

Every community and state can work to better align its unique mentoring needs with its local assets. To most effectively do this work, community leaders can adopt best practices that have already been tested and proven at the federal level and in other states, cities, and towns, including by integrating mentoring into the strategies of state agencies that promote education, youth development, and community service. Leaders can work to implement policies that provide public employee release time to engage in mentoring, raise revenues to support mentoring, and administer state mentoring grant programs. In Washington and Indiana, license plate campaigns generate financial support for mentoring. In





Massachusetts, a competitive line item in the state budget supports mentoring and is administered by the Mass Mentoring Partnership. States have also helped drive cost savings and operational efficiencies for quality mentoring programs, such as by offering free background checks for mentors. In cities such as Jacksonville, Tulsa, and Pittsburgh, mayors have used their platforms to lead city-wide mentor recruitment campaigns and drive public-private coordination in expanding mentoring opportunities for young people.

### **Federal Policies**

Given the return on investment and savings to taxpayers from quality mentoring programs, federal policies and funds should promote the implementation of evidence-based practices. In order to ensure quality and increase the number of children served, competitive grants could be designed by federal agencies that require quality mentoring as a qualification, or reward it as a

preference. Funding competitions at agencies including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Corporation for National and Community Service, which already support mentoring, could further spur innovation, advance research, and support the scale of programs that work. Interagency task forces, including the Federal Mentoring Council, which must be re-established, and the Task Force on Expanding National Service, should develop strategies to meet the mentoring needs of our nation's youth.

In addition to agency-designed competitive grants and interagency collaboration, Congress should work to ensure that the FY 2014 budget includes \$90 million for the Youth Mentoring Program at the U.S. Department of Justice, and expand access to funds for long-unfunded mentoring programs at other agencies. New and current federal funds should be highly leveraged for maximum impact. Public funds can attract and magnify private sector investment through matching requirements or incentives, and leverage the "people power" of volunteers, a core piece of most program models' service delivery. Regulations for funding should also promote the implementation of evidence-based practices to achieve specific outcomes. For example, the Transition-to-Success Mentoring Act, introduced in August 2013, would establish a national competitive grant program to combat the nation's high school dropout rate and better prepare off track middle school students for a productive transition to high school by utilizing mentors as "success coaches." Additionally, the FOCUS Act (the America's Fund for Future Opportunities and Outcomes), introduced in November 2013, would use revenues from corporate civil and criminal penalties to support evidence-based youth mentoring programs as one of three planks of ensuring future U.S. global competitiveness and leadership.

- **Ensure all structured mentoring is quality mentoring.** The mentoring field has codified quality youth mentoring through *The Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, yet the broad interpretation of “mentoring” in public policies and funding programs can lead to inconsistent quality and ultimately, uneven results. Facilitated by *Mentoring Partnerships* (third party intermediary organizations who are well-equipped to serve in a quality assurance role), MENTOR’s National Quality Mentoring System provides an ongoing opportunity to recognize and support quality mentoring programs. A corresponding demand for quality from major stakeholders, including the philanthropic sector, parents and youth themselves, will result in a deeper focus on quality assessment and continuous improvement, and deepen the impact of mentoring programs.
- **Support and increase private sector engagement in mentoring.** Given the combination of financial and human resources (including more potential mentors) and its business interest in the development of the current and future workforce, the private sector is uniquely positioned to strengthen the fabric of communities. Many national, regional, and local private sector companies already champion this important work, developing youth mentoring strategies in close collaboration with partners and staying informed by the evidence base. Companies can offer employees paid time off to volunteer, financially support external mentoring programs, and set corporate mentoring goals. In return for these investments, corporations see increased employee productivity, improved morale and retention of employees, and improved public image and community relations. The Corporate Mentoring Challenge, originally launched by



First Lady Michelle Obama, and a developing Ad Council campaign called *Pathways to Employment*, offer leverage points for greater recognition of exemplary models of engagement in mentoring and provide roadmaps for replication.

- **Facilitate connections between research and practice.** The mentoring field has an increasingly robust research and practice base. These two communities should be more closely integrated, aligned, and informed by one another in order to most efficiently and effectively meet young people’s mentoring needs. Practitioners, through participating in quality assurance efforts like the National Quality Mentoring System, have the opportunity to more deeply apply evidence-based practice to their work. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funded National Mentoring Resource Center can provide opportunities for programs to learn how to more effectively incorporate research-based practices into their work. Efforts such as the Center for Evidence Based Mentoring at the University of Massachusetts Boston provide robust opportunities for researchers and practitioners to engage in ongoing dialogue with one another. Other leading national organizations have also identified mentoring in their research-based toolkits to drive student outcomes, including the Middle School Matters Field Guide, the Grad Nation Community Guidebook, and United Way Worldwide’s “Solving
- the High School Graduation Crisis: Identifying and Using School Feeder Patterns in Your Community.” These tools should be leveraged by local communities, as well as informed by the most recent lessons from research and practice.
- **Explore innovations to close the mentoring gap.** In order to close the mentoring gap, additional adult mentors must join the effort to meet the needs of young people each year. Innovations in how existing mentoring programs collaborate may also hold promise for closing the mentoring gap. Rigor and evidence should guide the sector as it develops innovations to meet this need. Two examples of cutting-edge innovations — technology and youth-initiated mentoring — may have the potential to dramatically increase the supply of adult mentors. The best-in-class technology-driven programs ensure evidence-based practices are effectively translated to their platforms with well-implemented and supported curricula to achieve intended outcomes. Likewise, youth-initiated mentoring provides youth the tools to codify mentors in their lives. The use of technology and youth-initiated mentoring should continue to be tested, and other innovations yet unknown should be encouraged, unearthed, and evaluated. In addition to the public and private sector funding outlined earlier, support could be generated through new innovative initiatives like individual crowd-funding.

**Dr. Betty Molina Morgan, 2010 American Association of School Administrators  
“National Superintendent of the Year”**

“As a teacher, principal, and superintendent, I’ve seen how mentors can profoundly affect students’ lives and when integrated and leveraged by schools, can contribute to successful student outcomes.”

**Dr. Robert Balfanz, Director, Everyone Graduates Center at the Center for  
Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University**

“A high quality mentoring relationship can be a game changer for these students. We’ve seen how sustained supports from adults serving in schools as ‘success coaches’ for off-track students, and intensive wraparound supports for the highest-need students, can turn around lives and help turn around schools.”

**Melody Barnes, Chair, Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, and former Director of the  
Domestic Policy Council and Assistant to President Obama**

“There are 6.7 million 16-24-year-olds who are disconnected from school and work. Developing relationships with caring and supportive adults through mentoring is a key tool through which we can help these young people achieve their dreams. The promise of a generation depends on our efforts to reconnect these young people to education and career opportunities.”

**Dr. Anthony Carnevale, Director, Georgetown University Center  
on Education and the Workforce**

“Mentoring, particularly skills-based mentoring and apprenticeship programs, prepares our future workforce by exposing young people to the world of work and developing their life skills and vocational skills which are critical to success in today’s economy.”

**Mark Edwards, Executive Director, Opportunity Nation**

“When young people are connected to caring adults, communities do well. That is why Opportunity Nation has identified mentoring as a pillar of our shared plan to rebuild the American Dream.”

Survey Respondents

**“My mentor attended the college I’m at now, and she took me out and informed me of how to get into college. She was always there to support me.”**

**“My mentor came into my life and provided structure, did things with me that my parents couldn’t.”**

**“[Having] positive role models in the community, particularly role models who were teachers, has helped me to get where I am today. I wouldn’t be pursuing a teaching career had I not had mentoring experiences growing up.”**

**“Growing up, I often wished there was someone older that cared enough about me to spend time listening to my problems or what I was struggling with or even just what was going on in my life.”**

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