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Traditional one-on-one, community-based mentoring can certainly be considered an out-of-school time activity, since matches typically meet during the non-school hours. But one youth-adult match getting together once every week or two does not constitute an after-school program as currently defined.

Mentoring can be an effective way to connect children and youth to *people* who are in turn in a position to connect them with *possibilities*. After-school programs, on the other hand, offer young people consistent *places* to go. A high quality program can, in and of itself generate a sense of belonging, and may provide opportunities to explore more possibilities than the average mentor can create on their own. The real question, then, is not which makes more sense — mentoring or after-school — but rather how can we utilize both strategies to increase the likelihood that young people have access to people, places and possibilities, crucial developmental supports that they need in order to thrive.

What is the relationship between mentoring and after-school — two fields that have garnered significant policy attention and momentum over the past several years? To what extent is there movement toward collaboration and integration? Research suggests there is good reason to consider connecting and integrating strategies. From a policy advocacy perspective, there is potential synergy in linking efforts. And on the ground, for reasons ranging from the philosophical to the practical, programs are busy tackling this integration, using a range of creative models.

At the outset, we should note that comparing mentoring and after-school is a little bit like comparing apples and oranges. Mentoring is a specific strategy, while after-school programs are places where a range of strategies can be implemented. We do not mean to suggest that one is interchangeable for the other; our experience and conversations with experts in both the mentoring and after-school fields suggests otherwise.

Years of research and common sense suggest that kids need access to caring adults who are concerned with and focused on their growth and development. We know that mentoring can have positive effects when certain conditions are met such as regular contact, training and support for mentors,¹ conditions that can be facilitated by structures and supports available through after-school programs.

This commentary explores connections being made between the mentoring and after-school fields at the program, research and policy levels, and challenges decision makers in both fields to strengthen the web of supports children and youth experience in communities by finding opportunities to learn from one another. This piece was informed by interviews with numerous policy experts, researchers and practitioners whose ideas and suggestions are integrated throughout.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROGRAMS

“This integration solves many practical problems facing the mentoring field. You have adults who already like kids, interacting with them on a daily basis. You also have those kids and adults in the same place at the same time, doing activities together that create a common ground for developing relationships.”²

— GAIL MANZA, MENTOR

At the program level, partnerships between mentoring and after-school efforts abound. In fact, many Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies are physically housed within community-based organizations that run after-school programs. Twenty-two percent of the roughly 10,000 after-school centers receiving 21st CCLC funds say that offering mentoring activities is a high priority.³

In addition to building formal mentoring opportunities within after-school programs, a more subtle but equally important trend is underway. As after-school programs increasingly recognize mentoring as a critical dimension of their work, they are taking steps to be more intentional about strengthening youth-adult relationships already occurring in their settings. Jean Rhodes applauds this intentionality, “After-school programs that get caught up in implementing tightly stipulated curricula or focusing narrowly on skill development don’t necessarily have the time to support the informal interactions that happen between kids and adults.”⁴

Looking at the overlap from a young person’s perspective is helpful, according to Lisa Pickard of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. “We need to create more opportunities for young people to be engaged in ways that make sense for them, with adults who are invested in knowing them. Rather than having a competition between mentoring and after-school, what’s critical is that the adults in kids’ lives are talking to each other and have a network of support around them.”⁵

While mentoring language and ideas are increasingly making their way into the vocabulary of after-school, not every after-school staff person is automatically a mentor. Gail Manza, executive director of MENTOR, a national mentoring advocate, described the difference this way. “When program staff work with a lot of kids they often only scratch the surface. But when they have the time and the mandate to take a special interest in individual children, learn what it is those children want to achieve, and then help them try to achieve it — that’s moving into mentoring.”⁶ To help strengthen the informal mentoring that occurs in many programs, MENTOR has developed a series of resources for after-school programs (*see sidebar*).

STRENGTHENING YOUTH-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

There is no one formula that describes how mentoring and after-school should fit together. Efforts to intentionally enhance the relationship aspect of after-school programming appear to differ based on several considerations:

- **Who.** Programs can intentionally assign staff to mentor participants or they can engage volunteers to serve as mentors.
- **Where.** Matches can meet at the after-school program facility or elsewhere in the community.
- **When.** Matches can meet during the after-school program’s hours of operation or at other times, including evenings and weekends.
- **Why.** Mentoring relationships can be general or they can have a particular focus such as providing academic support or career development.

As practitioners mix and match these possibilities in different ways on the ground, many creative models are emerging (*see pages 4–5*). In addition to the basic differences described above, other dimensions warrant careful consideration, including the intensity and duration of relationships, whether matches are one-on-one or involve small groups of youth or teams of mentors, and whether mentoring is the primary activity or one of many after-school offerings.

It is also important to note that without a significant infusion of new resources, small steps can and should be taken on both sides of the equation to blend approaches. For example, after-school programs can develop policies and strategies to ensure that every child in the program has at least one substantive, positive interaction with an adult each day. Mentoring programs can periodically provide structured activities after school for matches to participate in. Small steps like these draw on the relative strengths of one strategy to increase quality in the other.

RESOURCES FOR PROGRAMS

MENTOR’s After School Clearinghouse features tools and resources for implementing mentoring within after-school programs. Resources address:

- Program Planning and Design
- Program Management
- Program Operations
- Program Evaluation
- Mentor Training

www.mentoring.org/afterschool

MENTOR’s Elements of Effective Practice Toolkit includes tools and advice for implementing and adhering to rigorous guidelines that help ensure quality mentoring.

www.mentoring.org/eep toolkit

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

“The bottom line from my research is that the mentoring provided by staff is the most important strength of after-school programs. Serious effort should go into making mentoring a focal point of these programs.”⁷

— BART HIRSCH, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Decades of research from a rich variety of social science disciplines has helped uncover the critical roles that adults — be they family members, teachers, care givers, coaches, mentors or others — play in the lives of children and youth. Since the 1990s, research on mentoring and after-school programming as two types of interventions aimed at increasing supports for young people has increased exponentially.

More recently in the mentoring field, research on school-based and other alternative forms of mentoring has picked up steam. Some researchers interested in mentoring have begun looking at youth-adult relationships in the after-school context as well,⁸ and others are exploring the role that mentoring plays in the context of multi-component youth programs.⁹

On the after-school side, in the past year alone, several important studies have shed light on the role that youth-adult relationships play in the after-school context. Here we highlight lessons from three such studies (*see Research Spotlight*) that we feel advance the knowledge base supporting both mentoring and after-school and help integrate what we know about these two fields.^{10, 11, 12}

Do adult-youth relationships matter? Based on persuasive findings from all three studies, we can answer this with a resounding YES. All three studies suggest relationship-building matters more than any other program feature. In fact, Hirsch found that for some youth, their relationships with their after-school program staff were more strongly linked to self-esteem than were their relationships with closest kin.

Why do adults matter in programs? The MARS and YPQA studies underscore that it is at the “point-of-service” — the space where youth and adults interact in programs — where the rubber hits the road. While broader organizational features and policies are important, quality is driven by how youth experience programs — how they interact with adults and peers, opportunities they have to belong, make choices, make plans and reflect.

What do successful after-school program staff do? Hirsch suggests that effective staff appreciate and trust youth, are comfortable with themselves and with helping youth deal with a range of personal issues, have clear

expectations for youth’s behaviors and are enthusiastic and supportive. The YPQA and MARS studies emphasize the importance of adult staff creating well-designed, engaging skill building opportunities, providing choices, sharing control and creating opportunities for youth to partner and lead.

How can programs strengthen adult-youth relationships?

Hirsch suggests that after-school programs identify mentoring as a priority and maximize the potential for such relationships to develop through intentional program design as well as efforts to attract and retain high quality staff, a strategy also emphasized by the MARS study. The YPQA study suggests that high quality training combined with continuous improvement processes can systematically improve staff practices.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

A PLACE TO CALL HOME: AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR URBAN YOUTH

Bart Hirsch’s research illustrates how youth-staff relationships are “the heart and soul” of urban after-school programs. A mix of qualitative and quantitative research conducted over four years at six urban Boys and Girls Clubs paints a rich picture of how recreation and mentoring intertwine to socialize youth toward positive identities.

www.apa.org/books/4317059.html

THE MASSACHUSETTS AFTERSCHOOL RESEARCH STUDY (MARS)

The MARS study, conducted by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the Intercultural Center for Research in Education, identifies the characteristics of after-school programs that positively affect youth outcomes, in particular engaged adult staff. MARS also shows that programs with more highly educated and better-paid staff are of significantly higher quality.

www.uwmb.org/MARS-Report.pdf

YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT VALIDATION STUDY

In validating this quality assessment tool, High/Scope offers insights into the relationship between program quality and youth psycho-social outcomes. Program features with the strongest relationship to such outcomes are concentrated at the “point-of-service” — where youth and adults interact. Interactions and engagement are critical indicators of quality. The importance of sharing control with young people stands out as particularly important.

www.highscope.org/EducationalPrograms/Adolescent/youthPQA/youthPQASummary.pdf

INTEGRATING MENTORING INTO AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

GIRLS INCORPORATED OF LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS

“Engaging youth in a different way — in this case through our new mentoring program — allows us to see them in a different light. Seeing them with their mentors has helped the staff understand them better and we can use that understanding to work with them more effectively during the regular after-school program.”¹³

— Lena Crowley, Director

Program Basics

A hybrid of small group and one-on-one mentoring, Girls Inc. of Lynn matches middle school girls with women volunteers to provide activities from photography and ballroom dancing to cultural field trips and homework assistance. Lynn is one of the highest priority communities for the United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB), due to the prevalence of poverty, gang activity, violence and other risk factors facing the area's young people.

The Mentoring/After-School Connection

Mentors and their matches meet in the evenings after the regular Girls Inc. after-school program ends. Following a group dinner, a staff person introduces an activity that matches then go and work on together. At the heart of the activities is a focus on personal development and communication, gender equity, careers and building healthy relationships. While one staff person drives girls home following the evening's activities, the program coordinator has time to debrief and reflect with the mentors.

Context

Girls Inc. is one of three organizations in Lynn that has received funds from the UWMB to participate in a pilot effort to integrate mentoring and after-school activities. According to creator Lisa Pickard, the United Way's intention was to “cultivate relationship building as an anchor in after-school programs...by integrating volunteer mentoring strategies and training program staff so they can be more intentional.” While after-school programs do tend to hire people who enjoy working with kids, Pickard noted “they do not necessarily know how to build intentional relationships with them.”¹⁴ To this end, in addition to playing a role in funding and evaluating the programs' effectiveness, UWMB also partners with Mass Mentoring Partnership and Wellesley College to provide professional development opportunities for volunteers and staff.

For more information, see www.girlsinlynn.org

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF THE GREATER TWIN CITIES

“Partnering with the Boys and Girls Club has enabled us to serve a sector of youth that can otherwise be very difficult to reach.”¹⁵

— Alicia Schwarz, Director of Enrollment, Matching & Outreach

Program Basics

Targeting an often transient population of low-income youth ages 7–13, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of the Greater Twin Cities works in conjunction with the Boys and Girls Club to provide a community setting for mentors and their matches to connect and spend time together. According to Program Coordinator Alicia Schwarz, this co-location “makes face-to-face contact much easier for staff and volunteers, with a sector of youth that can be difficult to serve.” The program is coordinated by a BBBS staff person whose office is located in the Boys and Girls Club, and matches have regular contact with staff for activities and training. The program's focus is on relationship building that is tailored to the individual needs of the child, which may involve improving school performance, building self confidence or developing positive social skills.

The Mentoring/After-School Connection

While initial plans for the program called for youth and their mentors to meet during the after-school hours at the center, the program has become more flexible and now offers the option of matches meeting at the club for activities like arts, sports, family events and dinners, or spending time together on their own, outside of the club context. The club serves as an important anchor in the mentoring relationships. At a basic level it facilitates contact, since phone calls or other methods of connecting can fall short. The club setting also provides opportunities for mentors to meet and interact with their mentee's peers and other adults in their life.

Context

Community-based matching through the Boys and Girls Club is one of several programs offered by the BBBS of the Greater Twin Cities. Other opportunities under this umbrella include a “Big Couples” program, where a pair of adults in a committed friendship or relationship works to support a single child. Another innovative effort is the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program — a collaborative effort with the Search Institute, the Council on Crime and Justice, and the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota to train and support mentors for children of incarcerated parents. BBBS also offers a school-based mentoring program where matches meet during the school day, usually over the lunch hour.

For more information, see www.bigstwincities.org

INTEGRATING MENTORING INTO AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS (CONT.)

YMCA READS AND THE FLORIDA MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

*"YMCA READS takes to heart our desire to have academics at the forefront of the mentoring relationship...and is designed to parallel what students do in class during the day."*¹⁶

— Roxann Campbell, Volunteer Florida Foundation

Program Basics

With assistance from the Florida Mentoring Partnership, this fall 20 YMCA sites across the state of Florida kicked off an intensive reading support/mentoring program for first and second graders. The YMCA READS program is intended to meet children's developmental and educational needs by providing them with small group and one-on-one support through a curriculum that blends reading instruction with relationship building and efforts to increase self-esteem. Students are referred to the program by elementary schools and YMCAs based on their need for reading remediation.

The Mentoring/After-School Connection

According to the program's creator, Roxann Campbell, "YMCA READS takes to heart our desire to have academics at the forefront of the mentoring relationship...and is designed to parallel what students do in class during the day." Children and their volunteer mentors meet and work on literacy activities together at YMCA locations after school. The program centers around instruction in two pre-approved curricula: After School Kids Lit and Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics and Sight Words (SIPPS). The program is also designed to work with both parents and teachers to "create a seamless plan of action for improvement."

Context

YMCA READS is one of a range of mentoring opportunities available for elementary through high school youth in cooperation with the Florida Mentoring Partnership. The partnership was born out of Governor Jeb Bush's 1999 Mentoring Initiative, with the dual goals of advocating for the statewide infusion of mentoring into policy and practice and promoting collaboration among state agencies, municipalities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, individuals and schools. The Florida Mentoring Partnership built an online data system that allows YMCA READS to monitor students' academic and social outcomes. With data from the state, local districts and the program itself, the system can provide real-time information on mentor/mentee ratios and mentoring hours for each child and volunteer.

For more information, see www.flamentoring.org

PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT CONTRACT, ANN ARBOR NEUTRAL ZONE

*"PAC was developed as an intentional way to ensure that underserved youth who come to our drop-in center are also engaged in the more intensive leadership and education programs that are available."*¹⁷

— John Weiss, Executive Director

Program Basics

Housed within the Neutral Zone, a teen center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Personal Achievement Contract (PAC) pilot project is designed to support the positive development of low-income, minority youth and to ensure their access to a range of educational and leadership opportunities already in place at the center. Based on a developmental assets approach, PAC combines what the Neutral Zone has always provided — "a safe, supervised space to do homework, hang out with friends, eat dinner or relax and find support," with a linked set of supports including individualized mentoring, educational resources and opportunities for community leadership.

The Mentoring/After-School Connection

Through its three-part structure of one-on-one mentoring, academic support and community engagement activities, PAC focuses on helping youth achieve both personal and educational goals. The model calls for teens to meet weekly with their mentors and access after-school tutoring, job readiness training, college workshops and college visits. Participants in the year-long track also take part in job shadowing and community internships. The community leadership component provides teens with opportunities to stay engaged over the summer months by undertaking a community research project, the results of which are shared with leaders and policy makers at a youth-led forum.

Context

Neutral Zone's PAC program brings a new level of intentionality to the organization's work by transforming what some youth experience as simply a drop-in program into an intensive, multi-component support strategy. PAC relies on advisory support and cooperation from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the Ann Arbor Public Schools, the Ann Arbor District Library, and selected state and local policy officials. Volunteer mentors are drawn from Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan, as well as the surrounding community, while internship opportunities are provided by local businesses and nonprofits.

For more information, see www.neutral-zone.org

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY AND ADVOCACY

*“During the last legislative session the Illinois House established a mentoring task force. The After-School Partnership worked with them and testified at a hearing about the importance of mentoring as part of an overall out-of-school time strategy.”*¹⁸

— JENNIFER BECKER-MOUCHINE, ILLINOIS AFTER-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Unfortunately, advocacy efforts related to children and youth issues sometimes mirror the fragmentation characterized by current policies and service delivery systems, which tend to isolate specific problems and respond with narrow solutions. As one prominent state advocate put it, “We mirror the dysfunction of government.”

Along these lines, Gary Walker warns, “Focusing on mentoring only as a program can easily play into the zero/declining-sum game because mentoring’s advocates, in their zeal to expand, will undercut the importance of other initiatives — that’s what competition is all about.”¹⁹ In the case of mentoring and after-school, however, some linkages among advocates exist and more seem to be emerging.

Major advocacy organizations representing each field, MENTOR and the Afterschool Alliance, along with many service providers like Boys & Girls Clubs and Big Brothers Big Sisters, are active members of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a membership organization whose goal is to provide a united advocacy voice to improve the conditions of young people in America.

Beyond participating in joint agenda-building through NCY, formal collaboration between national advocates is fairly limited. Jen Rinehart of the Afterschool Alliance described the pressures leading to this reality. “In an atmosphere of limited resources, advocates tend to dedicate their energy to funding streams that most benefit the groups they represent. While mentoring represents an important piece of our overall agenda, and we would fight to keep those funds flowing, the mentoring funds that are available can’t support a comprehensive after-school program.”²⁰

At the state level, however, more joint work appears to be underway. Gail Manza of MENTOR noted that 22 of their 26 state mentoring partnerships are active members of their state’s after-school networks. As MENTOR’s efforts to link these two fields expands, Manza believes facilitating and strengthening these relationships is critical.

According to David DuBois, the need for linkages is real and the benefits of collaboration are mutual. “We need to overcome the artificial boundaries placed around each area

and bring the key policy and other stakeholders from each field together to look for the overlap. While after-school programs could benefit from more intentional mentoring, it is equally the case that mentoring could benefit from looking at things going on the after-school area.”²¹

Jean Rhodes thinks about connecting mentoring and after-school by looking at youth relationship needs on a continuum. “Some kids need 24-hour attention. Some are good at seeking out support from adults in their daily lives. And then there are those in the middle. For that vast majority of kids, if we could strengthen the relationship component of after-school, we’d get a bigger return on our investment.”²²

STATE-LEVEL LINKS BETWEEN MENTORING AND AFTER-SCHOOL

Illinois. The Illinois After-school Partnership, the state network charged with supporting and strengthening after-school programming across the state, is working with the leadership of the recently established Illinois House of Representatives One to One Mentoring Task Force to promote the critical role that mentoring plays in the out-of-school time hours. In addition, the Partnership’s network of organizations includes many mentoring programs and after-school programs with strong mentoring components.

Massachusetts. The Mass Mentoring Partnership is working with the United Way of Mass Bay to support three Lynn-based after-school programs in developing and implementing mentoring strategies within their programs (see box on page 4). The United Way is also leveraging its relationships with the business community to engage employees as mentors through apprenticeships, internships, and summer and after-school jobs.

Florida. The Florida Mentoring Partnership has linked mentoring efforts across the state to academic and social supports for children, integrating mentoring into the school day and into after-school programs. At the state level, partnerships with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, Girl Scouts, Communities in Schools and other agencies serve as vehicles for linking and expanding after-school mentoring opportunities.

Iowa. With both the Iowa Afterschool Alliance and the Iowa Mentoring Partnership now formally affiliated with Iowa’s Promise, relationships between the mentoring and after-school fields in Iowa are growing. In addition to increased sharing of resources, strategies and tools, state agencies that come together under the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development are actively seeking state funds to sustain both initiatives.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

“Mentoring in after-school programs represents a wise investment strategy — concentration of resources. A child can get tutoring assistance, a mentor, and a safe place to be. That’s a good thing — call it wrap-around, coordination, the point is the same — the more supports concentrated around the child, the better.”²³

— GAIL MANZA, MENTOR

During a period of belt-tightening and skepticism in the social services, with war and national security dominating budget negotiations, it is noteworthy that both mentoring and after-school have maintained level funding over the past several years. On the mentoring side, 2006 appropriations included roughly \$50 million to the Mentoring for Success program and \$50 million to the Mentoring for Children of Prisoners program. On the after-school side, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program was level-funded at \$981 million, and the Child Care Development Block Grant at \$2.1 billion.ⁱ

These funding levels, while disappointing to advocates who point to significant unmet demand in communities across the country, do speak to the political palatability of each strategy. Mentoring and after-school are now almost considered essentials, while things like food stamps and health care are suffering severe cuts.

Quite popular as social interventions go, elected officials are regularly singing the praises of mentoring and after-school, and efforts are underway across the country to build sustainable local and state systems. For example, Governor Schwarzenegger’s signature Proposition 49 initiative will soon pump over \$400 million additional state dollars into after-school programming in California. At the national level, January marked the announcement of a new, cross-departmental federal mentoring council.

CAPITALIZING ON CONNECTIONS

Young people need access to people, places and possibilities. In response to that need, it is important to resist inefficient policy approaches that create a people program here and a places program there. It is natural to assume that mentoring should be an important component of after-school programs — the question is how to best support and encourage that integration. Partnerships alone do not automatically lead to integrated services, and integration alone does not automatically improve quality.

i. While Mentoring for Success suffered a blow in the President’s proposed 2007 budget, advocates are organizing their constituencies and are hopeful funding will be restored to at least 2006 levels.

There is significant cross-over in how mentoring and after-school programs draw down on the funding streams mentioned above. Mentoring activities are being supported with 21st CLCC funds, and after-school centers receive federal mentoring funds. Whether they lead with a “people” strategy like mentoring or a “places” strategy like after-school — organizations are working creatively to maximize resources and build stronger supports and opportunities on the ground.

Practitioners have been building connections between mentoring and after-school for decades. A logical next step for both fields is to more formally acknowledge those connections, ensure they are well understood and effectively implemented, and expand them to ensure that all children and youth have access to the people, places and possibilities they need to thrive.

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OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME
POLICY COMMENTARY

#

11

PEOPLE, PLACES AND POSSIBILITIES: INTEGRATING MENTORING AND AFTER-SCHOOL

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This commentary explores connections being made between the mentoring and after-school fields at the program, research and policy levels, and challenges decision makers in both fields to strengthen the web of supports children and youth experience in communities by finding opportunities to learn from one another and integrate approaches. The real question is not which makes more sense — mentoring or after-school — but rather how can we utilize both strategies to increase the likelihood that young people have the crucial development supports they need in order to thrive.

What is the relationship between mentoring and after-school — two fields that have garnered significant policy attention and momentum over the past several years?

To what extent is there movement toward collaboration and integration?

