

Invisible Mentoring: Keeping All Students Connected

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Students need to feel connected to and cared about at their school. When this feeling is absent, students can feel isolated, discouraged, and overlooked. Forming caring relationships with these students in particular can combat the feeling of alienation they are often experiencing. According to Bonnie Benard, in her book, *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*, students want teachers that will truly listen, notice when they are absent, and take an interest in them (2004). Benard also writes, “studies of school dropouts repeatedly identify the lack of anyone who cared about them as students’ main reason for leaving school” (2004, p. 69). It is with this very fact in mind that schools may decide to implement an invisible mentoring program.

What is invisible mentoring?

- Focused attention on students identified as at-risk of failure or alienation
- A feasible plan for reaching out to those who are “quiet, unpopular, or most likely to fail”

How does one identify which students to mentor?

- Staff members (not necessarily just teachers) look at student lists
- Marks are made by the names of kids that the staff member has made a connection with
- Those students with few or no marks are targeted

How does one decide which staff member gets which student?

- If some natural connection is present, that staff member should be assigned that student
- Otherwise, students are divided up reasonably equally among staff members
- Staff should be encouraged to choose students that are easily accessible to them

How does one start the mentor/mentee relationship?

- Start off small, just saying hi, or asking how they are doing.
- Talk to other adults in the school who know your mentee to learn more about their schedule, activities they are involved with or other interests.

How does one keep connected?

- When addressing the mentee be sure to use their name at least after the first few encounters.
- Be curious about your mentee, ask them questions about themselves, or what they did over the weekend. If possible, ask them to help you out with something.
- If you do not see your mentee, ask them about where they were.
- Be frequent in your contact, at least once a week, if not daily.

Things to Remember:

- Building a relationship takes time. The student was selected because of a lack of relationships, so they may have a particularly difficult time forming a connection or seem wary of it initially.
- Don't let it fizzle. Be committed to making frequent contact.

What are the benefits of invisible mentoring?

- All people benefit from having positive relationships in their lives, and students especially benefit from having positive relationships with adults.
- Schools that have implemented invisible mentoring notice that students become more engaged and have fewer referrals.
- Students that have positive relationships with adults are more resilient.
- Effects of mentoring may last a lifetime.
- It provides adult support and can increase a students' assets.

Resources:

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco: WestEd.

Davis, D. & Race L. *Building assets in schools: Moving from incidental to intentional*. In partnership with The Commission on Children, Families, & Community of Multnomah County.

Search Institute. (2003). Boosting student achievement: New research on the power of developmental assets. In *Insights and Evidence: Promoting Healthy Children, Youth, and Communities. 1*, 1-10.