

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Metropolitan Milwaukee

Innovation 2015

In fall 2014, Big Brothers Big Sisters is implementing mentor2.0 as part of a national pilot in nine markets across the country. Mentor2.0 utilizes innovative strategies to serve high school students in high-impact mentoring relationships that lead to high school graduation and college readiness.

Mentor2.0 is based on a successful technology-enriched mentoring model developed by iMentor. iMentor has developed in-person and online mentoring over the past 15 years and serves 3,000 students annually. We are partnering with iMentor to implement mentor2.0.

Innovative mentor2.0 features include:

- Weekly student-mentor communication via a secure online system. This technology-based approach is appealing to high school students; engages new volunteers by providing flexibility to those who may not be able to commit to traditional in-person mentoring; and delivers rigorous, consistent mentoring.
- A research-based, college-focused curriculum that guides student-mentor communication and helps matches achieve specific educational outcomes.
- A long-term model where each student receives continuous mentoring throughout high school and into the first year of college.

Mentor2.0's technology-enhanced approach efficiently serves students at critical times in their lives and allows Big Brothers Big Sisters to serve a greater number of youth by attracting more volunteers. Over 50 new volunteers will begin mentoring students September 1, 2014.

Big Brothers Big Sisters made a strategic decision to implement a new service delivery option in 2014 to address the growing and critical community need of preparing high school youth for successful futures. Mentor2.0 is a unique technology-enriched one-to-one youth mentoring option that serves low-income, first generation high school students.

Mentor2.0 provides high school students with the support and guidance they need to graduate from high school, increase college readiness, and succeed in college and the workforce.

Mentor2.0 maintains the fundamentals of quality mentoring Big Brothers Big Sisters is known for, including:

- One-to-one relationships.
- Careful screening and matching of youth and volunteer mentors.
- Comprehensive volunteer training.
- Ongoing case management and relationship support for students and volunteer mentors.
- Measurable youth outcomes.

Mentor2.0 expands on this by using technology for weekly interaction between the student and mentor and utilizing a customized weekly curriculum that facilitates and supports match interaction. Students and mentors meet in-person monthly to build relationships while completing curriculum tasks.

HIGH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

To implement mentor2.0, Big Brothers Big Sisters is partnering with Veritas High School in Milwaukee. We have gained buy-in from key individuals at Veritas who understand the value of mentoring, including students, the school principal (who sits on Big Brothers Big Sisters Board of Directors), teachers, counselors, and parents.

For the 2014-2015 school year, Big Brothers Big Sisters will match 50 Veritas freshmen with college educated, career-focused mentors and provide on-going professional support for the duration of each mentoring relationship. Volunteers will mentor students through high school and into the first year of college. Each subsequent school year, a new cohort of freshmen will be enrolled in mentor2.0.

TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM

Mentor2.0's online mentoring platform facilitates student-mentor engagement through a secure, staff-monitored email system and a college-focused curriculum. This state-of-the-art mentoring platform allows program staff to:

- Facilitate mentor recruitment and screening.
- Expedite and enhance student-mentor matching.
- Encourage meaningful and consistent communication between students and mentors.
- Monitor the frequency of student-mentor communication.
- Provide real-time professional support and case management.
- Effectively support student-mentor relationships.
- Measure program participation rates, student outcomes, and ultimate success.

RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULUM

Youth mentoring experts have developed a comprehensive college-focused curriculum that guides student-mentor communication and ensures mentors are effective in helping students achieve specific educational outcomes. The mentor2.0 curriculum brings rigor, consistency, and tools to measure success against a set of clearly defined goals, all without compromising the inherently personal, organic nature of a quality mentoring relationship.

The mentor2.0 curriculum:

Develops non-cognitive skills critical to college success, including critical thinking, perseverance, utilizing a growth mindset, and optimism/excitement about the future.

Increases college knowledge needed to successfully navigate the college process, including college exploration, college application processes, financial aid access, and transition processes.

DEDICATED MENTORS

Big Brothers Big Sisters recruits college-educated, career-focused volunteer mentors from many local corporate partners.

Mentor2.0's combination of in-person and online mentoring provides mentors with flexibility in the volunteer commitment without compromising the amount of match interaction or rigor needed for effective mentoring relationships. Mentors will work with students through high school and into the first year of college.

PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES

The mentor2.0 curriculum provides a strong foundation for each mentoring relationship. However, it cannot predict every challenge students and mentors will face. To ensure strong relationships and assist mentors with challenges that arise, a mentor2.0 Program Coordinator provides every match with high quality case management support. The Program Coordinator is responsible for tracking progress towards college readiness benchmarks, coaching students and mentors through challenging situations, linking matches to additional resources, and ensuring matches meet participation benchmarks.

The Program Coordinator also facilitates weekly classroom sessions on specific topics and facilitates curriculum-focused assignments with mentor2.0 students.

CONSISTENT, CURRICULUM-FOCUSED STUDENT-MENTOR CONTACT

Mentor2.0 combines safe, staff-monitored online communication between students and mentors and monthly in-person meetings.

Each week, the Program Coordinator facilitates online interaction between students and mentors by introducing a specific curriculum topic, encouraging classroom discussion, and offering prompts to stimulate meaningful communication. The Program Coordinator also checks in with students as they email their mentors to provide guidance. Curriculum topics include:

- Establishing a Foundation for a Successful Mentoring Relationship
- Inspiring Curiosity and a Love of Learning
- Cultivating Optimism and Excitement about the Future
- Learning to Utilize a Growth Mindset
- Understanding the Importance of Resiliency and Perseverance
- Building Help-Seeking and Self-Advocacy Skills
- Understanding and Developing Social Capital Skills

Students and mentors have monthly in-person meetings. Monthly events allow mentoring matches to build relationships, follow-up on email discussions, and complete curriculum-focused tasks. They also allow for the Program Coordinator to observe, interact with, and support matches.

THOROUGH PROGRAM EVALUATION

Big Brothers Big Sisters uses a rigorous methodology that is unmatched in the mentoring community. For more than 15 years, we have used outcome evaluation tools developed by leading youth development experts and researchers. Big Brothers Big Sisters reviews program outcomes for every student and every match relationship on an ongoing basis using the Outcomes Evaluation System. This measurement tool has three key components:

- 1) The Youth Outcome Survey is a scientifically proven evaluation tool that measures outcomes for youth in each match relationship by pre-testing youth entering the program and post-testing them each subsequent year.
- 2) The Strength of Relationship Survey measures the strength and quality of the bond between students and mentors, allowing staff to offer resources and specific guidance to matches as needed.
- 3) Professional case management by Big Brothers Big Sisters Match Support Specialists who contact each student, parent or guardian, and mentor monthly to discuss progress towards achieving goals, address specific needs, and ensure student safety.

The mentor2.0 technology platform is an additional evaluation tool that provides online documentation of metrics, including the frequency of contacts between students and mentors, progress toward completion of curriculum modules, attendance at mentor2.0 events, case management frequency, and documentation on the satisfaction level of both students and mentors.

All data is compiled monthly and annually, measured against multiple metric goals, and reviewed regularly. Our system allows us to evaluate mentor2.0 in real time, continuously learn, and drive program improvement.

Big Brothers Big Sisters has made a strategic decision to develop mentor2.0 to increase:

- The percentage of youth achieving grade promotion and graduating from high school.

- The percentage of youth enrolling in and attending college.
- Available mentoring options for volunteers, broadening our volunteer pool.

To successfully launch and implement mentor2.0, Big Brothers Big Sisters needs to invest in new staff, staff and mentor training, partnership development, online mentoring platform licensing fees, and marketing and recruitment materials.

Ruddie Memorial Youth Foundation funding will be used to fund direct program salaries, including hiring a mentor2.0 Program Coordinator to manage the program. During 2014-2015, the mentor2.0 Program Coordinator will recruit, enroll, match, and support 50 students and 50 mentors.

High school is a critical time in any student's life where their future depends heavily on academic success. Mentor2.0 targets low-income, first generation students and significantly increases their prospects for a bright future grounded in a solid education. It also offers a flexible mentoring option for volunteers who are unable to commit to weekly in-person mentoring. At the same time, mentor2.0 provides a rigorous and guided mentoring experience without compromising the inherently personal, organic nature of successful one-to-one mentoring relationships.