

Incentive Mentoring Program 2014

The Incentive Mentoring Program (IMP) engages underperforming high school students confronting significant barriers outside of the classroom by providing each one with a family of committed volunteers and increased access to community resources. We foster students' academic advancement and personal growth into self-motivated, resilient and responsible citizens.

The IMP model unites individuals from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and facilitates the formation of non-traditional, innovative families that transcend barriers, providing the foundation for strong communities and cities. Eligible students are identified in their freshman year based on low GPA (bottom 25% of their class), truancy, and detentions/suspensions. Once identified, students are interviewed to assess whether they have an abundance of challenges outside of the classroom (substance abuse, depression, extreme poverty). A cohort of students is then selected randomly from the eligible pool. Students are enrolled in IMP for almost a decade, which includes the remainder of high school and six years post high school graduation.

IMP matches each high school student with an IMP Family of up to eight university and community-based volunteers that customize their approach to address the specific needs of their student and family. A volunteer Head of Household (HOH) leads each IMP Family by coaching the IMP Family and coordinating comprehensive services for both students and volunteers. In the spirit of doing whatever it takes, IMP Family members provide mentorship, rides to school, morning wake up calls and connect students and their biological families to existing community resources by coordinating clothing, furniture and appliance donations, home renovations, and public assistance enrollment. IMP Families also work with IMP Resource Teams to provide opportunities for students to engage in safe environments for up to twelve hours per day, 365 days per year, in activities such as tutoring, SAT and college preparation, community service, enrichment events, and employment. While the IMP Families offer customized support, Resource Teams create access to expertise and efficiency in the recruitment and allocation of resources. The teams include IMP Academic Achievement Programs (Tutoring, School Liaising, APEX Learning), IMP Career Preparation Programs (College Preparation, SAT Preparation, Post-Graduate Support), IMP Enrichment Programs (Community Service, Enrichment, Summer Internships), IMP Student Services (Health, and Legal), and IMP Volunteer Services (Recruitment, Morale and Technology). The organizational structure of IMP allows work and responsibility to be distributed across minimal staff and hundreds of volunteers:

Almost ten years ago, IMP had a bold idea. We saw that no matter how many resource agencies channeled into programs aimed at improving learning and test scores, the programs failed to reach all kids using one approach. We thought, "what if we designed a program that could adapt to the needs of each kid?" So we built a network, we encouraged connecting and caring between university-based volunteers and underperforming high school students who were at risk of failing to graduate. When it comes to providing services for underperforming kids, few have attempted to blur or abandon the line between personal and professional, perhaps believing that such a choice would be at odds with the ability to sustain an organization. IMP blurs these lines and creates an extended family for all involved, believing this is the only way to develop a self-sustaining community where IMP is no longer needed. Over a decade, IMP has seen the impact that having an extended family of support has on students, volunteers and collaborators.

We intend to codify our model and build necessary infrastructure to increase the number of students we serve. While other support programs exist, the IMP model – from the pool of students we enroll to the length of enrollment to the commitment to never give up on a student -- is unprecedented. The family approach encourages involvement on a much deeper level, with volunteer-student interactions for at least six to as many as 40 hours per week, and ensures consistent support for the most underperforming students for almost a decade. Like Teach For America, IMP is designed to leave a lasting imprint not only on the students we serve but also on our volunteers. By supporting students and volunteers in identifying their own needs and then making them aware of existing resources by connecting them to a wealth of human capital in Baltimore and beyond, both students and volunteers gain confidence in their ability to be self-sufficient. The process of engaging leaders in the community also allows students and volunteers to form deep relationships with a diverse cross-section of local decision makers. And when corporations and institutions interact with our students and volunteers, they are building relationships with the next generation of leaders.

We intend to strengthen and expand our relationships with key volunteer and collaborator hubs and partner institutions, cultivating more agents of change that will allow us to support an increased number of students. To build on the current success, IMP will codify and test our model and develop further infrastructure and internal systems to support an even more expansive web of relationships.