SREE Symposium Spring 2015

Effects of Mentoring on At-Risk High School Students: A Cross-Study Analysis of the Implementation and Impacts of Three Prominent Mentoring Models

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First choice of conference section: Social and Emotional Interventions in Educational Settings

Second choice of conference section: Transitions for Youth

Discussant: David DuBois, University of Illinois at Chicago
Symposium Justification

The proposed symposium examines the effects of three different school-based mentoring models. Mentoring programs have been promoted by education leaders and researchers focused on improving student outcomes (e.g. Dynarski, 2008; Balfanz & Legters, 2006), and are increasingly common in practice. Mentoring programs generally assume that adults fostering supportive relationships with youth can facilitate social-emotional well-being, including a sense of connection to school and investment in learning. However, “mentoring” encompasses a wide range of activities, and mentoring programs often vary in their strategies employed, intensity, duration, cost, and intended outcomes.

Understanding the features and mechanisms of mentoring models that may drive program effectiveness is of critical importance for supporting at-risk students as they move through school. The papers in the proposed symposium will synthesize results from longitudinal studies of three mentoring programs: (1) iMentor, currently being examined in eight high schools in New York City; (2) Check & Connect, evaluated in San Diego high schools with at-risk general education students; and (3) Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBSSA), evaluated in a national study during the 2004-05 school year.

The first paper on iMentor examines implementation fidelity and effects of the program on students’ non-academic outcomes (e.g. developing “growth mindset,” critical thinking skills, and college aspirations) after a full year of implementation, using a quasi-experimental design. The second paper on Check & Connect reports full results from a four-year RCT designed to assess program impacts on at-risk students’ academic and non-academic outcomes all the way through high school. The paper also examines the intensity and nature of mentoring provided to students in the study sample. The third paper on BBSSA focuses on the importance of relationship quality in mentoring. Using data from a large-scale randomized evaluation of the program, the authors examine the effect of program participation on students who successfully connected with their mentors, in terms of perceived closeness. Together these papers provide a cross-cutting examination of school-based mentoring programs and evaluation methods. In addition these papers measure the hypothesized links between program implementation, non-academic, and academic outcomes. The discussant will synthesize major themes from across the papers and draw on insight from other relevant rigorous investigations, providing an engaging forum for participants.

The symposium is well-aligned with the focus of the Spring 2015 SREE conference, *Learning Curves: Creating and Sustaining Gains from Early Childhood through Adulthood* in that the studies focus on programs intended to elicit s non-cognitive and behavioral changes in students as a lever for longer-term learning and achievement. The social-emotional, non-cognitive effects may provide students with the skills and behaviors as they continue on the education pipeline from middle to high school to post-secondary into adulthood (Zins et al., 2007; Denhams & Brown, 2010; Conley, 2007).
Appendix A. References