

AN EVIDENCE-BASED IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Starting a School-Based Mentoring Program

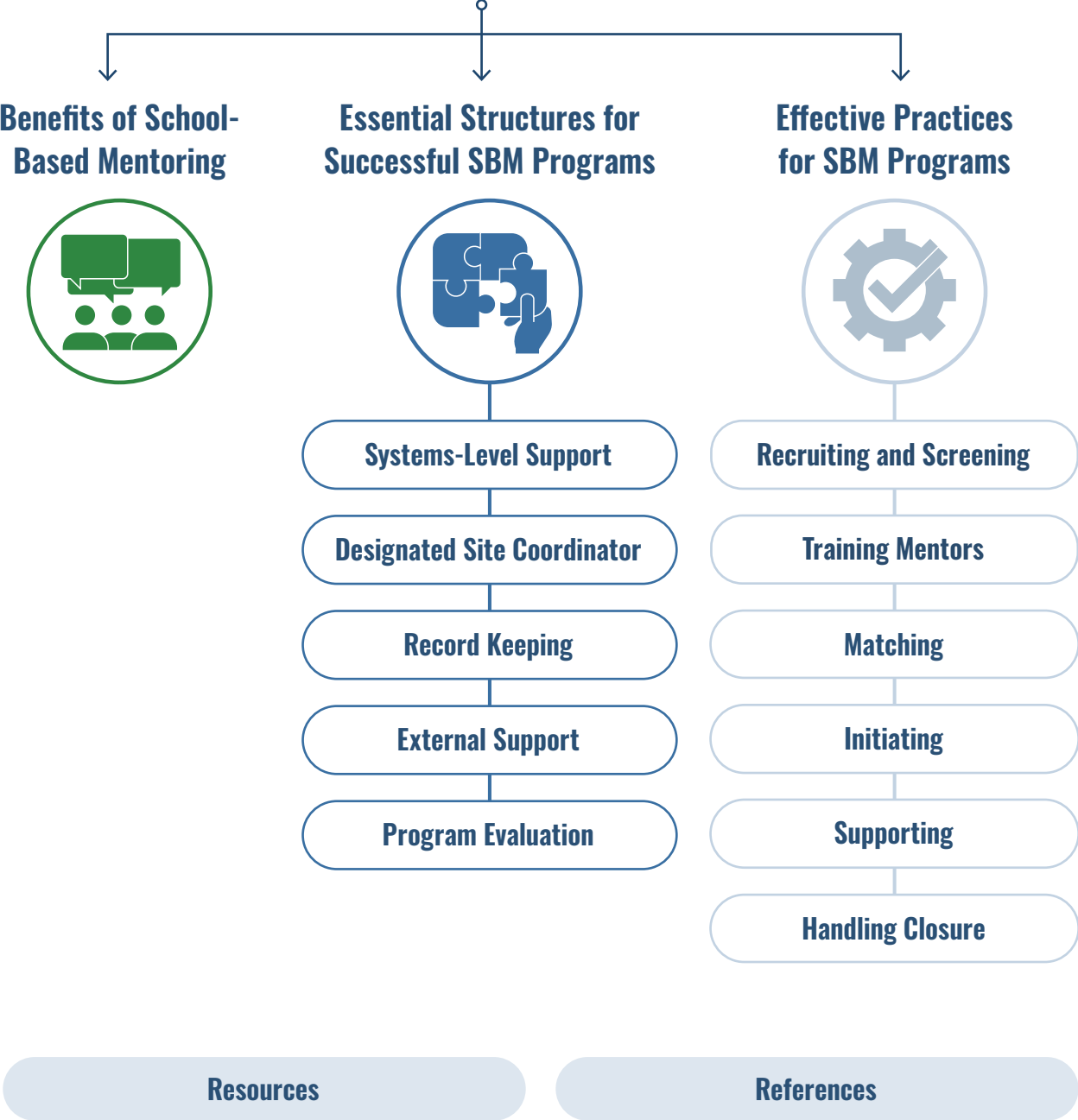


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Starting a School-Based Mentoring Program



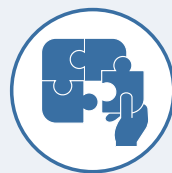
School-based mentoring (SBM) is any intervention that takes place within the school building that connects young people with an adult. In contrast to community-based mentoring, mentor-mentee matches in SBM programs typically meet for shorter periods of time (e.g., one hour per week instead of four hours per week), have a shorter duration, and set more instrumental goals (e.g., improve grades; Karcher, 2008).

In SBM programs, teachers and other school staff members usually identify students who are at risk academically, socially, or emotionally and would benefit from mentoring (Institute of Education Sciences, 2009).

This guide offers evidence-based best practices and resources for building-level leadership, district staff members, or state education agency (SEA) staff members who want to implement SBM programs. Our guide includes:



Benefits of school-based mentoring



Essential structures for successful SBM programs



Effective practices for SBM programs



Additional resources



Benefits of School-Based Mentoring

- In comparison to community-based mentoring, SBM is a cost-efficient way to support mentees' grades, attendance, school behavior, positive perceptions of their own academic abilities, and school belonging and prosocial peers (DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2011; Kuperminc et al., 2020; National Mentoring Resource Center, n.d.-b).
- Young people who have mentors are less likely to skip school, use drugs, start drinking, report depressive symptoms, or experience behavioral infractions at school (Ervin, 2021; Murphy, 2024).
- SBM programs can support academic improvements without emphasizing academics explicitly (Bayer et al., 2013).



Essential Structures for Successful SBM Programs

To set your SBM program up for success, consider six key structures in the planning phase:

- Systems-level supports
- Designated site coordinator
- Clear organizational structure
- Record keeping
- External support
- Program evaluation

Systems-Level Supports

SEAs, districts, and schools all have a shared responsibility to make the SBM program successful and impact students positively (Attendance Works, n.d.). SEAs and districts can provide systems-level supports for SBM programs that focus on building capacity and sharing resources (such as funds for site coordinator positions, space in school buildings, or data for continuous improvement and program evaluation).

To establish helpful relationships with districts and SEAs, school-based leaders and staff members can

- Identify a key supporter or champion during early meetings with SEA or district offices. This person should be someone respected in the school system who will promote the program to other school personnel (Jucovy & Garringer, 2007).
- Demonstrate how the SBM program will help achieve existing educational objectives (Jucovy & Garringer, 2007).

RESOURCE. *Before determining what resources a school needs to collect, evaluate the school's existing resources, including connections and champions. Resources and connections evaluation worksheet ("Worksheet #1: Opening the School Door")*

Designated Site Coordinator

It is essential to have a single point-person within the school who coordinates the SBM program. This person should be appointed by the school principal based on the staff person's interest, commitment, and background. If a staff person in the building already works in areas related to social work or behavioral health, SBM program coordination can be built into their existing job duties (Attendance Works, n.d.)

RESOURCE. [Sample site coordinator job description](#) (download from webpage)

Record Keeping

A clear record-keeping system is critical for organizing and maintaining important information such as mentee and mentor referrals, mentee and mentor eligibility checks, consent forms, mentor screening, match support, and a contact sheet for all matches.

These records are not only important for managing an SBM program effectively; they also provide important data on program strength and effectiveness. Record keeping can be a central function of the site coordinator.

Questions to consider when building your record-keeping system

- Who is responsible for creating and maintaining program records?
- What types of information should be documented?
- Do you have specific forms for tracking applicants and monitoring matches?
- Do you have a system in place for maintaining secure and confidential records of active program participants?
- Do you have a secure and confidential archival system for maintaining records of past program participants?
- When and how do you destroy records?
- Are electronic data stored securely and backed up periodically? If so, by whom and how? (Ballasy et al., 2007)

External Support

Several organizations provide support for SBM programs, including the national MENTOR organization and its [state affiliates](#).

You should also explore resources in your community that can help make your program a success (Murphy, 2024). Consider establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for any community partners you engage in your SBM program.

RESOURCE. [Sample MOU](#) (page 16)

Program Evaluation

Regular evaluation can demonstrate the effectiveness of your SBM program, which can help you make the case for expanding the program or securing additional funding. Evaluation can also support continuous improvement by examining which parts of the program have an impact and which parts could be improved (Soni, 2023).

The data you collect to evaluate your program should map to the specific outcomes you want to see. For example, if you want your program to improve attendance, academic progress, and social and emotional development, you should collect data that aligns with these three constructs over time (Murphy, 2024). Best practices include collecting data from before the young person had a school-based mentor and throughout their time in the match.

The ABCs of School-Based Mentoring (Jucovy & Garringer, 2007) offers a few key considerations

- Plan thoroughly for data collection. Consistent, routine data collection is critical to any SBM program and can be thought of as record keeping.
- Build your evaluation around your program goals and logic model (learn more about **building a logic model**).
- Measure program processes in addition to outcomes. This requires keeping records on how often the match pairs meet, what kinds of activities they do, etc.
- Plan to make improvements based on what you find (learn how data can be used in **continuous cycles of program improvement**).
- Use evaluation results in your program marketing.

Although program evaluation activities such as record keeping can be a responsibility of the site coordinator, you may also consider partnering with an external evaluator to assess the efficacy of your SBM program.



Effective Practices for School-Based Mentoring Programs

This section draws from the fourth edition of **MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring***, a selection of evidence-based best practices for strong, high-impact mentoring programs. In addition, **this MENTOR resource** helped organize the key ideas schools and districts should know when considering starting or supporting a school-based mentoring program.

Recruiting and Screening

Effective SBM programs have clear processes and criteria for recruiting and screening mentees and mentors (internal or external).

RECRUITING MENTEES

Start by understanding the specific needs of your students and building (Murphy, 2024). SBM programs can support grades, attendance, school behavior, positive perceptions of students' own academic abilities, school belonging, and prosocial peers (DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2011; Kuperminc et al., 2020).

Consider

- What types of mentees will your program focus on? (MENTOR, n.d.-a)
- What requirements or eligibility criteria are necessary for a student to become a mentee? Eligibility criteria may vary depending on the desired outcomes for your program (e.g., if your program aims to improve attendance, your eligibility criteria may include low attendance rates; if your program aims to improve school behavior, your eligibility criteria may include discipline referrals). Requirements (which involve students and their families) may include:
 - Commit to meet for a specific number of hours per month
 - Agree to sustain the relationship for a certain length of time (typically the academic year)
 - Consent to and complete the screening process
 - Attend orientation and training sessions
 - Communicate regularly and openly with site coordinator (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- What factors would disqualify a mentee from participating in the program?
Disqualifying factors may include:
 - The student will be moving this academic year
 - The student will be graduating this academic year
 - The student is related to someone in the school or is already well resourced"

When you have an idea of which students you want your SBM program to support, develop student recruitment materials, including

- A written statement outlining eligibility requirements and expectations for mentees
- Materials for caregivers and families explaining the benefits of mentoring and how they can support their student in their mentoring relationship (MENTOR, n.d.-a)
- A mentee referral form
- A consent form for parents/caregivers (MENTOR, n.d.-a)
- A system for documenting consent forms from parents/caregivers
- A recruitment plan

RESOURCES. [Sample mentee referral form \(page 92\)](#) | [Sample recruitment plan \(pages 64–65\)](#)

RECRUITING AND SCREENING INTERNAL MENTORS

One practice that makes SBM programs cost effective is the use of **internal mentors**: teachers and other staff members who already work inside the building. This practice has pros and cons.

Pros

- **Leveraging and valuing existing assets.** Asking teachers and school staff members to be formal mentors acknowledges that many adults in schools already serve as informal mentors—caring nonparental adults who support young people through naturally established relationships (Gowdy & Spencer, 2021).
- **Building capacity and relationships.** When adults in schools volunteer as formal mentors, they receive training and support which in turn nurture all the informal mentoring relationships the staff person already engages in (MENTOR, n.d.-a).

Cons

- **Potential role confusion for both mentors and mentees** (MENTOR, n.d.-a). If you decide to use internal mentors, clearly communicate their expectations and role as mentors as opposed to their other work in the building.
- **Power dynamics in asking employees to volunteer.** Given the power dynamics inherent in any place of employment, every effort should be made to ensure that school staff members are not "voluntold" to serve as mentors, or pressured to participate.

If you decide to use internal mentors, consider these next steps

1. Develop and share a written statement outlining the mentor volunteer description (MENTOR, n.d.-c). Include the time commitment and requirements regarding training and ongoing match support.

RESOURCE. [Sample mentor volunteer description](#)

2. Provide information to adults in the school building to explain how they can sign up to be mentors.

RESOURCE. [Sample mentor recruitment letter](#)

3. Set up a presentation for all interested parties to walk through the role and expectations of internal mentors in your program.
4. Develop eligibility criteria for mentors as well as criteria that would disqualify a mentor from participating in the program.
5. Meet with each participant individually to assess their interest in mentoring, understanding of expectations, and appropriateness for this role (MENTOR, n.d.-c).

Peer Mentors

Many SBM programs rely on near-peers, mentors who are at least two years older than the mentee (National Mentoring Resource Center, n.d.-a). Research supports peer mentoring as beneficial to both mentors and mentees. Peer mentoring increases school connectedness, the sense of positive relationships with adults and peers, and self-esteem (National Mentoring Resource Center, n.d.-a). Relationships with peer mentors are very similar in length and quality as those with adult mentors (Rhodes, 2014).

If you use peer mentors, clear programmatic infrastructure is important (National Mentoring Resource Center, n.d.-a). Peer mentoring programs need a lot of support for all student participants. Consider developing a structured curriculum of activities that supports the development of peer relationships (MENTOR, n.d.-c).

RESOURCE. MENTOR's [Peer Mentoring Supplement](#) to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*

Alternative Approaches to Supportive Relationships Within the School Building

SBM programs can support positive relationships within the school building—but they are not the only option! **Connect, Focus, Grow** is a training on how to create spaces in which adults understand their potential as informal mentors to young people.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING EXTERNAL MENTORS

Considerations for recruiting external mentors are similar to those for recruiting mentees, their families, and internal mentors.

You may need a more formal flyer and recruitment strategy if recruiting from outside the school building and community.

RESOURCES

[Sample mentor job description \(page 62\)](#)

Use online toolkits, including [Effective Mentor Recruitment: Getting Organized, Getting Results](#), to create effective recruitment messaging and materials

MENTOR's ["Find a Mentor"](#) page

MENTOR's [state affiliates](#)

Note: Screening is especially important for external mentors, who are not already background checked from previous involvement with the school community. All mentors should be screened using national, fingerprint-based FBI criminal background checks (MENTOR, n.d.-a).

Training Mentors

Once you recruit and screen mentors, invest time in training them on topics such as

- Contact with mentoring program (e.g., who to contact and when; MENTOR, n.d.-e)
- Relationship-monitoring requirements (e.g., response time, frequency, schedule)
- Approved activities (MENTOR, n.d.-e)
- Mandatory reporting requirements associated with suspected child abuse or neglect, as well as suicidality and homicidality (MENTOR, n.d.-e)
- Confidentiality and anonymity (MENTOR, n.d.-e)
- Digital and social media use (MENTOR, n.d.-e)
- Effective communication (Murphy, 2024)
- Active listening (Murphy, 2024)
- Cultural competency (Murphy, 2024)
- Building positive relationships with students (Murphy, 2024)

Adapt your trainings depending on whether you use internal or external mentors. For example, external mentors may need more information on topics related to positive youth development, while internal mentors may need guidance on boundaries in their dual role as mentors (MENTOR, n.d.-e).

It is important to provide ongoing training for mentors so they have support beyond the match initiation (MENTOR, n.d.-e).

RESOURCE. [Ongoing Training for Mentors: Twelve Interactive Sessions \(National Mentoring Resource Center\)](#)

Be sure to ask how the trainings are going! This feedback can be valuable data for supporting and retaining mentors as well as improving your program overall.

RESOURCE. [Training evaluation form \(page 108\)](#)

CREATE YOUR OWN TRAININGS

MENTOR advises that effective trainings should be tailored to the needs of mentors (for example, adult learners like to apply their life experience to their learning). Interactive trainings that incorporate diverse activities, including role-plays and scenarios, help trainees apply what they learn.

USE EXISTING ONLINE TRAININGS

Generally **MENTOR** and the **National Mentoring Resource Center** have great training resources, many of which are available for free.

RESOURCES. [Becoming a Better Mentor \(MENTOR\)](#) | [Growth Mindset for Mentors Toolkit \(National Mentoring Resource Center\)](#)

Matching Mentee and Mentors

Research shows that

- Racial and ethnic similarity between mentor and mentee supports longer relationships (Raposa et al., 2018)
- A shared interest leads to better outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011)
- A shared dislike of activities contributes to longer matches (Raposa et al., 2018)
- Logistic factors matter: match according to schedules and availability (MENTOR, n.d.-c)

Interview potential mentors and mentees on relevant factors to match on so you can improve the likelihood of an effective match.

RESOURCES. [Mentee interview form \(page 99\)](#) and [mentor interview form \(page 82\)](#)

Whenever possible, incorporate **youth voice and choice** into matching (Pryce et al., 2014). Models that allow youth to elect adults from their social world as mentors (then support those matches with training and support) have been linked to positive outcomes (Spencer et al., 2018). Importantly, when young people have the opportunity to match with someone of their choosing, they prioritize people who can help them reach their goals, who they trust, and who have demonstrated that they do not judge them (Pryce et al., 2014).

Learn about **youth-initiated mentoring**.

RESOURCE. MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* has guidance on matching

Initiating Mentoring Relationships

Develop a plan to initiate the match, whether one-on-one or in a group (MENTOR, n.d.-a).

Review goals, expectations and rules with all parties. Have mentors, mentees, and parents sign an agreement of what the relationship is and how to best support it.

RESOURCE. [Example “contracts” for mentors, mentees, and parents/caregivers](#) | *Mentors: page 115* | *Mentees: page 116* | *Parent/Caregivers: page 117*

Best practices for a first meeting

- Provide the mentor and mentee with background information about each other (MENTOR, n.d.-a)
- Plan to attend the meeting to make introductions and review program details (MENTOR, n.d.-a)
- Facilitate an activity that will help mentors and mentees feel comfortable and get to know each other (MENTOR, n.d.-a). Examples include:
 - “Getting to know you” questions to spur conversation
 - Play a sport or do something active so the participants can learn more about each other without simply sitting down to talk

Supporting Students and Their Mentors

Ongoing match support is crucial to monitor how the match is going and get ahead of any conflict that may arise (Spencer et al., 2020). In addition, match support is a great time to celebrate milestones in the relationship and provide mentors with ideas about activities (MENTOR, n.d.-a). Providing match support is a key responsibility of the site coordinator.

It is important to develop a plan on how and when to check in with each mentor and mentee separately.

Best practices of match support

- Interactive support: Use in-person or telephone contact whenever possible (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- Individual support: Check in with each party (mentor, mentee, parent) individually when possible (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- Ask open-ended questions when possible (MENTOR, n.d.-a). Example questions include (MENTOR, n.d.-d):
 - How is your match going?
 - How and how often did you communicate with your mentee last month?
 - What kinds of activities do you do together?
 - How do you decide what activities to do together?
 - How is your mentee doing?
 - What are you doing to build your relationship with your mentee? How is it going?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your mentee since we last spoke?
 - What, if any, interactions have you had with your mentee's family? How did they go?
 - How can I be of support?
- Log your check-ins with each party as part of your recording-keeping process (see "Essential Structures" section above for more on record keeping)

RESOURCE. [Example tracking forms \(page 121\)](#)

Handling the Closure of Mentor-Student Relationships

When the closure of matches is handled poorly or early, mentoring relationships can have negative impacts on young people (Grossman & Rhodes 2002; Karcher, 2005). Matches are more likely to end early when there is poor program infrastructure or major disruptions in the lives of either the mentor or mentee (Spencer et al., 2020). Without a supported closure process, youth may internalize negative feelings like abandonment, fear, or confusion (Spencer, 2007). Match support is a great way to see a closure coming and be able to support the young person through the match closure (Spencer et al., 2020). Talking about closure early and often is considered best practice to support positive experiences and outcomes for mentees.

In SBM programs, matches typically run one academic year and end at the start of summer break. Whether a match closes on time or prematurely, follow these best practices:

In communication

- Be clear and honest (MENTOR, n.d.-b)
- Keep it positive! (MENTOR, n.d.-b)
- Develop appropriate and realistic plans for continued communication (MENTOR, n.d.-b)
- Give the mentee ample warning that the match is ending (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- Encourage both the mentor and site coordinator to communicate to the mentee that the match is closing (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- Encourage the match to do something special to celebrate their relationship (Ballasy et al., 2007)
- Encourage the youth to express their feelings (Ballasy et al., 2007)

In procedure

- Develop a policy and process for managing both anticipated and unanticipated closures (MENTOR, n.d.-b)

RESOURCE. [Example closure procedure \(page 128\)](#)

- Use exit interviews to gather data on the experiences of mentors, mentees, and families

RESOURCE. [Example exit surveys for mentors, mentees, and families \(pages 132–134\)](#)



Additional Resources

In addition to all the resources cited and linked above, we recommend these resources for developing your SBM program:

- [*Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring \(MENTOR\)*](#)
- [*Webinar - Grassroots Mentoring Program Development from the Ground Up \(MENTOR\)*](#)
- [*Webinar - Mentoring Programs Know Before You Grow \(MENTOR\)*](#)
- [*Starting a Youth Mentoring Program learning experience \(MENTOR\)*](#)
- [*Relationships Matter: A Toolkit for Launching an Elementary Success Mentor Initiative \(Attendance Works\)*](#)
- [*Youth Mentoring Program Planning and Design Resources \(Education Northwest\)*](#)

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