RESEARCH INSIGHTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

An NMRC E-Newsletter Focused on Mentoring Research and Research-Informed Tools for Program Improvement

Welcome to the second edition of the National Mentoring Research Center E-Newsletter! This quarterly newsletter focuses on mentoring research, the work of the NMRC Research Board, and emerging knowledge that can help you plan and implement more effective mentoring services for youth. In this issue, we:

- **Feature some great insights from Dr. Bernadette Sánchez and Yesenia Garcia-Murillo about the importance of racial, ethnic, and cultural background similarity for some mentoring relationships**
- **Summarize some great new research articles produced by the members of our NMRC Research Board and other scholars, and**
- **Offer information about a new NMRC publication that you may have overlooked**

This quarter we will also start a regular feature of answering a question from the field about mentoring evaluation and research. Please see the end of this issue for a great question and answer about the use of post-only measures of outcomes in mentoring contexts. If you have a question you'd like to submit for the next issue, please write to rbennett@mentoring.org and we'll answer a few user-submitted questions next time.

Thanks for reading and look for more research-focused newsletters, in addition to our usual NMRC updates, in the year ahead!

- Rachel Bennett, Research Manager at MENTOR

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NATIONAL MENTORING RESOURCE CENTER
A Program of OJJDP

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The Role of Mentor Support for Ethnic-Racial Identity and Mentor Ethnic-Racial Similarity in Young People's Ethnic-Racial Identity and Psychological Well-Being

Yesenia Garcia-Murillo, MA – PhD candidate at DePaul University
Bernadette Sánchez, PhD – NMRC Research Board Member

An established benefit of youth mentoring relationships is enhanced psychological well-being for mentees. Mentoring relationships have been found to lower psychological distress, reduce anxiety (Van Dam et al., 2018), and promote self-esteem (Liang et al., 2002). According to the model of youth mentoring by Jean Rhodes (2005), identity development is an avenue through which mentoring relationships promote positive developmental outcomes in children and adolescents. An important aspect of identity for youth of color is their ethnic-racial identity, which refers to the beliefs and attitudes about one's ethnic-racial group membership (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Researchers have found that a positive ethnic-racial identity promotes the healthy development of children and teens of color, such as higher academic achievement and motivation, higher self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and less drug use and exposure (Rivas-Drake, Seaton et al., 2014). Hence, it is crucial for the mentoring field to learn how mentoring relationships and programs can support the development of a positive ethnic-racial identity among youth of color.
Our research team wondered whether and how mentors and mentoring relationships promote a positive ethnic-racial identity in young people of color. We investigated two aspects of mentoring that may promote a positive ethnic-racial identity: a) mentor support for mentee's ethnic-racial identity and b) ethnic-racial similarity between mentors and mentees. We examined these aspects of mentoring in the natural mentoring relationships of college students of color at two predominantly White institutions of higher education. Being a student of color in these settings can be psychologically distressing because of the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions in higher education (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Experiencing more frequent racial microaggressions is related to more depression and anxiety symptoms among college students of color (Torres-Harding et al., 2020). The role of a mentor is critical in the healthy development of older adolescents of color, and particularly in aiding their ethnic-racial identity development, which may counteract the negative effects of racism in higher education. We explored the following questions:

1) Does mentor support for ethnic-racial identity and ethnic-racial similarity between mentors and mentees promote mentees' ethnic-racial identity?

2) Does a positive ethnic-racial identity predict higher self-esteem and reduced psychological distress?

3) Does ethnic-racial identity serve as an avenue through which ethnic-racial similarity and support for ethnic-racial identity leads to a positive psychological well-being?

How We Conducted Our Study

Data from this study were collected through an online survey in 2018 with college students at two predominantly White universities. The survey asked students who had a natural mentor to rate the ethnic-racial similarity between themselves and their mentor ("To what extent is your personal background similar to your mentor's racial/ethnic background?") and how much support their mentor provides them in their ethnic-racial identity (e.g., "My mentor helps me learn new things about my racial/ethnic background and culture."). Students also answered questions about their ethnic-racial identity by asking them about their positive feelings towards their ethnic-racial group (e.g., "I feel good about people from my ethnic group."). There were 231 survey respondents (age range 18 to 26 years, average age = 19.85) with at least one natural mentor. The majority of students were female (72%), and students identified as Latinx/Hispanic (34.2%), Asian/Asian-American (23.4%), African American/Black (15.6%), Multiracial (20%), Middle Eastern/North African (2.6%), Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (.4%), or other (1.3%).

Key Findings

Ethnic-Racial Similarity Between Mentors and Mentees:

- More ethnic-racial similarity between mentors and mentees was related to higher self-esteem.
- Unexpectedly, more ethnic-racial similarity was related to more psychological distress. We think that perhaps students who were experiencing more psychological distress turned to mentors who were more ethnically-racially similar to them.
- We didn't find that ethnic-racial similarity was related to students' ethnic-racial identity.
- In line with Rhodes' model (2005), we found that ethnic-racial similarity was indirectly related to students' self-esteem and psychological distress through their ethnic-racial identity. That means that by promoting a positive ethnic-racial identity, then the positive identity has trickle effects on well-being.

Mentor Support for Ethnic-Racial Identity:

- More mentor support for students' ethnic-racial identity was related to a more positive ethnic-racial identity.
- More mentor support for ethnic-racial identity was related to higher self-esteem, but it wasn't related to psychological distress.
- In line with the youth mentoring model, we found that more mentor support for ethnic-racial identity was related to higher self-esteem through students' positive ethnic-racial identity.

Conclusions

A key question in the mentoring field is whether and how race matters. This study shows the aspects of race that matter in youth mentoring relationships: a) the ethnic-racial similarity between mentors and young people of color and b) the support that mentors provide to young people of color around their ethnic-racial identity. When mentors (no matter their race) provide support to mentees around their ethnic-racial identity, it helps young people of color to feel good about their ethnic-racial group membership, which has important

consequences for their well-being. Mentoring programs, staff and volunteers need to find ways to repair and prevent further harm that young people of color experience on a daily basis. If we care and hope that youth of color become healthy adults, then adults need to provide the necessary support to help them develop a positive sense of who they are. Further, we found that more ethnic-racial similarity between mentors and mentees was related to higher self-esteem and that a positive ethnic-racial identity was a mechanism in promoting this self-esteem. Having a close relationship with a positive role model who looks like you helps young people of color to feel good about who they are, which then improves their self-esteem.

A key limitation of our study is that we only surveyed college students at one time point which means that we actually don't know if ethnic-racial similarity and ethnic-racial support actually *caused* these positive effects in college students. It is possible that students with a more positive ethnic-racial identity or higher self-esteem are drawn to mentors who look like them or seek the support of mentors around their ethnic-racial identity.

Recommendations for readers:

- Check out this blog post to learn how mentors and program staff can help youth of color develop a positive ethnic-racial identity.
- Staff and volunteers who work with young people of color, including those in higher education, should be trained on how to provide culturally relevant support and how to support them in their ethnic-racial identity. Staff and volunteers should also be trained on what to avoid (e.g., asking youth of color to speak on behalf of their entire ethnic-racial group, promoting a "colorblindness" approach; Banks & Dohy, 2019)
- Ask yourself: What are the messages that are communicated to youth of color about who they are through the interactions and policies at our institution, organization, or program? Review the policies and culture of your setting and work to change them as needed.
- Ask mentees what they are looking for in a mentor. Does the ethnicity-race of the mentor matter to them? In what situations might it matter?

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NEW RESEARCH OF INTEREST

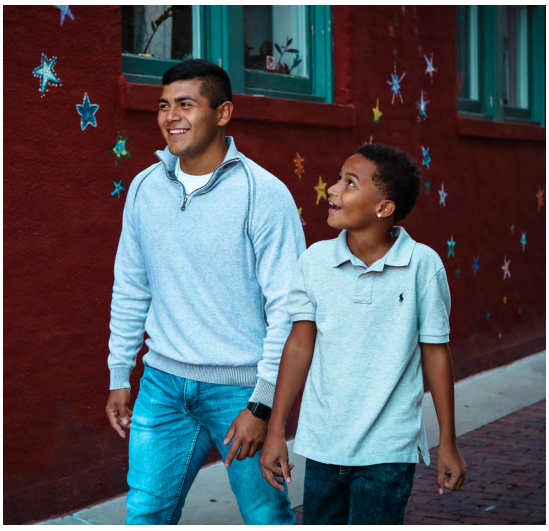
Each quarter in this space, we'll highlight new(ish) research articles that might be of interest to those of you planning, running, and evaluating mentoring programs. Where these articles are publicly available, we have provided a link. For those that are not, you can likely get them through the journal collections of your local public library or any academic library you have access to. In most cases, article authors are also able to share single copies with folks who contact them. Please reach out to the NMRC if you have questions about how to access one of the articles mentioned below. NMRC Research Board members are noted in bold text and Associate Board members are noted in bold italics.

Cultural Humility Training for Mentors: Lessons Learned and Implications for Youth Programs

- by **Amy J. Anderson**, April Riordan, Lavasha Smith, Bridget Hillard, & **Bernadette Sánchez**

This paper presents lessons learned from a research-to-practice partnership between mentoring program practitioners and researchers that focused on the development and implementation of a cultural humility training for volunteer mentors. Using multiple data sources (e.g., training materials, field notes, mentor surveys), the authors present a description of the research-to-practice partnership and the Culturally Smart Relationships pilot training content. They also generated practice-oriented lessons to inform future cultural humility training work with staff and volunteers in youth programs. The lessons reflect recommendations that emerged from five project phases: (a) organizational commitment to justice, equity, diversity, inclusion; (b) training curriculum and logistical planning; (c) "To Zoom, or not to Zoom"; (d) facilitation of the training; and (e) post-training and ongoing support. The pilot training content and lessons learned have implications for youth programs by elucidating training as one component of a broader approach for equity in youth developmental program practice.

Relevance for practitioners: An informative read for any practitioner or program seeking to learn more about cultural humility and how it might be integrated into mentor training. This paper offers key takeaways from a randomized pilot evaluation of Culturally Smart Relationships (CSR), a social justice and race equity training for mentors. The CSR curriculum aims to develop mentor competencies in their ability to provide culturally relevant support to mentees and has the potential to foster positive program outcomes, including youth identity development and mentor-mentee relationship quality.



Available at: https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2022.1186

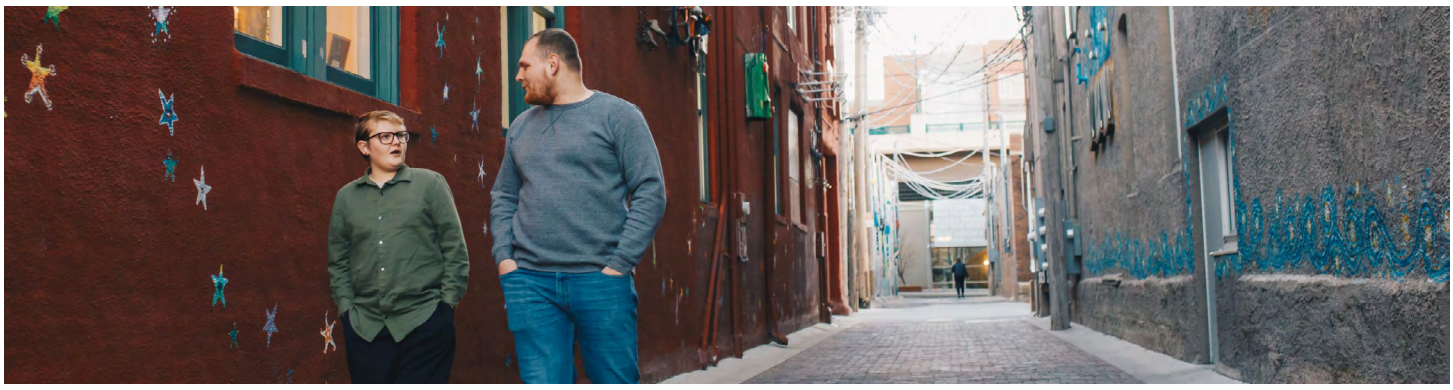
The Comparative Roles of Mentor Self-Efficacy and Empathy in Fostering Relationship Quality with Youth

- by Kelsey L. Deane, Ashley A. Boat, Shelley A. Haddock, Kimberly L. Henry, Toni S. Zimmerman & **Lindsey M. Weiler**

Youth mentors' efficacy beliefs and relational skills should both influence the quality of their connections with their mentees, but a lack of research based on large, dyadic and longitudinal samples limits understanding of how mentor characteristics impact relationship quality. This study used three staged and process-focused structural equation models to (1) investigate the mutually reinforcing effects of mentor self-efficacy and empathy over time; (2) compare the longitudinal effects of mid-program mentor efficacy and empathy on end of program mentor and mentee perceptions of relationship quality; and (3) test a similar comparative model using cross-sectional end of program assessments to account for developmental changes in these variables over time. The sample consisted of 664 college-age mentor (76.5% female; x age = 24.5, range = 21–53; 23.5% non-White) and youth mentee (41% female; x age = 14.1, range = 10–19; 41.9% non-White) dyads. Mentor empathy predicted mentor perceptions of relationship quality at both time points and mentee perceptions at the end of the program. Mentor efficacy only predicted mentor reported relationship quality at the end of the program. The findings emphasize the importance of investing in empathy training for mentors to support both partners' positive evaluation of the relationship. Program support to increase mentor self-efficacy should also have added value for mentors.

Relevance for practitioners: Utilizing data collected for an evaluation of Campus Connections (CC), a 12-week mentoring program pairing university undergraduates with youth ages 11-18, this study attempts to discern both the significance of mentor empathy and self-efficacy relative to mentor-mentee relationship quality and the potential for these skills to foster program effects. Findings suggest that though mentor empathy and self-efficacy are inter-related skills, mentor empathy had a consistently stronger influence on mentor-mentee relationship quality at the end of the program when compared to self-efficacy; although, mentors' report of self-efficacy at program-end were associated with enhanced perceptions of relationship quality. As programs consider what makes an effective mentoring relationship and how best to invest limited resources, findings from this study emphasize the necessity of mentors that can demonstrate empathy for their mentees. Providing mentors with initial and ongoing training opportunities to grow empathic competencies has the potential to facilitate stronger mentor-mentee bonds regardless of program focus on relational or targeted approaches.

Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10964-022-01584-7



Formal youth mentoring relationships in the context of risk: What is the role of caregiver–mentor collaboration?

- by McKenna F. Parnes, **Carla Herrera**, **Thomas E. Keller**, **Manolya Tanyu**, G. Roger Jarjoura, & Sarah E. O. Schwartz

Most research on youth mentoring relationships has focused on the mentor–mentee dyad, yet caregivers play an important role in supporting these relationships. Drawing on a large, multisite sample of youth in formal mentoring programs (N = 2165), this study investigated associations between caregiver–mentor collaboration and mentoring relationship outcomes in the context of environmental and individual youth risk factors. Analysis of novel quantitative measures assessing caregivers' experiences of the mentoring relationships revealed two factors reflecting caregivers' collaboration with mentors (caregiver involvement and mentor backing), and three factors reflecting caregivers' perceptions of mentor effectiveness (meeting youth needs, advocating for youth, and supporting youth behavior). Results indicated that greater caregiver involvement was associated with higher-quality and longer-lasting mentoring relationships. Few associations between risk and mentoring relationships were observed; however, indirect effects indicated that youth environmental risk was positively associated with caregiver involvement, which, in turn, was positively associated with mentoring relationship outcomes.

Relevance for practitioners: Caregivers are important partners in the mentor-mentee relationship; their level of engagement can positively or negatively influence the mentoring relationship. But to what extent do individual and environmental stressors moderate a caregiver's role in the mentor-mentee relationship? The authors of this study shed new light on how programs and mentors may consider caregiver involvement and how this collaboration may improve both relationship, and program outcomes. Findings suggest that youth whose caregivers were more involved in their mentoring relationship had higher-quality and longer-lasting mentoring relationships highlighting the significance of integrating caregiver engagement into mentor training as well as program policy.

Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jcop.22990

How can we leverage mentors to build student resilience?

- by **Manolya Tanyu** with valuable input from Kellie Anderson

The latest blog post from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment's *Voices from the Field*. *Voices from the Field* is a place for administrators, teachers, school support staff, community, and family members to learn what experts – researchers, practitioners, family – from across the country think by reading a short post that includes the latest promising practices on a range of school climate topics, along with references and related resources.

Relevance for practitioners: This installment of *Voices from the Field* highlights the increase in both academic and social-emotional challenges experienced by students as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and underscores the potential for mentoring to foster youth resiliency through relationship-centered approaches. The blog highlights several school-based initiatives offering a means to support skill-building in students. For example, enhancing relationship-rich school environments where students can benefit from positive

relationships with natural mentors (such as coaches, teachers, and other school personnel) or, through efforts to integrate community mentors into school systems to provide more intensive one-on-one support for students. Additional resources are linked in the post where practitioners can find activities, tools, and videos on relationship-based strategies.

Available at: https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/voices-field/how-can-we-leverage-mentors-build-student-resilience

"I'm Glad That I Was Given a Second Chance to Live": the Buffering Impact of Turning Points in the Lives of Young People with Foster Care Experience

- by **Heather N. Taussig**, Louise Roberts, Jonathan Scourfield, & Colette Franz

Young people with a history of out-of-home care placement are at risk for a host of adverse outcomes, yet many demonstrate resilience by young adulthood. One mechanism by which well-being may be achieved is through a turning point (TP). This study had two key questions: (1) What do TPs look like for care-experienced young adults? (2) Does having a TP buffer the impact of early adversity on young adult well-being? Participants (N = 166) were interviewed in pre-adolescence and again in young adulthood.
Baseline measures of adversity (ACEs) and life satisfaction were associated with young adult life satisfaction. In young adulthood, participants were asked an open-ended question about having a TP and four fifths of participants stated that they had a TP. Although having a TP was unrelated to demographic factors, living situation histories, or type of maltreatment, a multiple regression predicting young adult life satisfaction found a significant interaction between having a TP and ACEs, over and above baseline control variables. In probing the interaction, there was no association between ACEs and life satisfaction for those with a TP; for those without a TP, however, there was a negative association between ACEs and life satisfaction. In conclusion, having a TP in adolescence seemed to buffer the impact of early adversity on later well-being among young adults with a history of out-of-home care. The nature of the TPs varied, but having any TP seemed to lead to maturation and realizations which may serve as protective factors while navigating the transition to adulthood.

Relevance for practitioners: This qualitative study considers the role of turning points in the lives of young adults with a history of foster care experience and the potential for these turning points to serve as a protective factor during the transition into adulthood, and even impact overall life satisfaction. Nearly 75% of participants self-reported that a turning point was, or led to, a moment of maturation or realization, and 60% reported modifying or changing problem behaviors or attitudes as part of their turning point. It is also worth noting that the authors found that early adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were associated with low life satisfaction *only* in youth who did not report experiencing a turning point. Mentors can serve in a supportive role in guiding youth through reflection to ultimately make meaning of challenging life experiences but engaging in this process particularly during significant developmental phases like adolescence, may serve as an important protective strategy and enable youth to positively modify attitudes and behaviors.

Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42448-022-00129-6

"Pick your team wisely": A case study of a long-standing research-practice partnership

- by **Theresa N. Melton**, Jennifer P. Agans, Ben Lawhon, Timothy J. Mateer, Stephanie Freeman, & B. Derrick Taff

Research-practice partnerships (RPP) provide opportunities to connect researchers, practitioners, and/or community development professionals in meaningful ways, thereby improving the quality of research, evaluation, and practice in communities. Yet, there is still much to learn about how successful partnerships between researchers and practitioners develop. Historically, research on this topic has emphasized challenges that prevent RPP from developing to their highest potential, with limited information available on ways to promote RPP and how to ensure RPP are mutually beneficial for participants. However, research on partnerships more generally, such as multisector partnerships, can contribute meaningfully to the RPP field. The authors present an in-depth case study on a successful, long-term partnership. In this study, the authors pull from the broader partnership literature to explore contexts that are likely to promote partnerships, as well as the activities that can strengthen RPP. Findings focus on addressing ways to promote RPP and highlight the importance of preexisting factors, such as a culture that values both researcher and practitioner expertise, history, and chemistry between partners. Additionally, nonprofessional space and time, productive disagreements, clear but evolving roles, and shared power were found to strengthen collaboration within the partnership. Specific advice for anyone considering joining an RPP is also discussed.

Relevance for practitioners: Although the concept (and utility) of a research-practice partnership (RPP) may be well known to many, the specific activities which lead to a mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership may remain more elusive. This study considers the RPP between the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and the Pennsylvania State University which has been active for over a decade. The authors offer candid reflections and concrete strategies to address some of the most common pitfalls when engaging in a RPP, such as inequitable workloads, disproportionate power-sharing, and unequal reward.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2022.102169

Social acceptance from peers and youth mentoring: Implications for addressing loneliness and social isolation

- by Westley L. Fallavollita & **Michael D. Lyons**

Youth mentoring may be able to support lonely and socially isolated youth. This study examined the association between participating in youth mentoring programs and mentee perception of social acceptance from peers. Regression models considered the association between mentoring and peer social acceptance in terms of demographics, program features, and baseline peer relationship quality for
693 youth from 27 mentoring programs. The construct validity of a social acceptance scale was explored. The scale suggested two factors of peer social acceptance. No significant changes in peer social acceptance were observed before and after participating in mentoring programs. Trends in social acceptance indicated that positive/negative feelings

in the mentor–mentee relationship were associated with positive/negative indicators of peer social acceptance. Mentoring programs may be able to help prevent loneliness and social isolation through positive aspects of the mentor–mentee relationships, but additional intervention activities are likely necessary to support lonely and socially isolated youth.

Relevance for practitioners: Although findings from this study did not identify any significant changes in youth reports of social acceptance before and after participating in mentoring programs, several observed trends provide insights for future directions of youth mentoring and its potential to impact loneliness and social isolation. For example, based on the authors' findings, a positive mentoring relationship alone is unlikely to drastically improve feelings of loneliness or isolation, but can serve as a learning opportunity to grow preexisting relationship competencies. Mentoring has the potential to address loneliness and social isolation, but more research is needed to understand the mechanisms and specific mentoring activities to ameliorate perceptions of social acceptance and belonging.

Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jcop.23002

Term of the Month: Replication Research

- prepared by the National Institute of Justice

A replication study is a scientific study that attempts to validate findings from prior research by asking the same or similar scientific questions as the original research study. Replication matters because the peer review process alone does not guarantee the integrity of the reported results. Replication studies strengthen science by independently confirming the validity of research findings. When results are consistent across studies, the results of the original study are more likely to be reliable. Research is generalizable if a second study addresses a similar scientific question and finds consistent results in contexts or populations that differ from the original context or populations.

Relevance for practitioners: Here practitioners can learn more about replication research, what may prevent or limit a study's potential to be replicated, and the difference between research replication and reproducibility. Included in the post are links and resources for additional learning about replication research, as well as access to the National Institute of Justice's archive of past *Term of the Month* posts.

Available at: https://nij.ojp.gov/term-month?utm_campaign=feb23totm&utm_content=default&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Reconnecting Students to Educational Pathways: Learning from the Communities In Schools Reengagement Coordinator Initiative

- by Zeest Haider & Leigh Parise

Dropout rates soared during the COVID-19 pandemic as schools struggled to adapt and keep students engaged. Virtual classes, hybrid learning options, and unexpected closures characterized the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 school years, and complicated an unprecedented and unpredictable period. For many students who were on the cusp of completing high school, that milestone was suddenly out of reach due to missed school, failing grades, and the dual

pressures and trauma of the pandemic and the economic downturn. While the pandemic brought greater attention to the need to provide support to disengaged students, school systems have long struggled to reconnect with students who are not regularly attending school or who drop out. This brief describes the Reengagement Coordinator (RC) Initiative, a qualitative study launched during the 2021-2022 school year by Communities in Schools (CIC).

Relevance for practitioners: With strain only growing in already overburdened school systems, school-level supports are not consistently able to address the needs of students struggling with school engagement and who are at risk of dropping out entirely. The RC Initiative sought to fill this critical gap by designating one individual to provide ongoing one-on-one support to students as they navigate completing their education. Evaluation of the initiative elucidates the most commonly experienced barriers to school engagement (e.g. loss of motivation, the need to support family, mental health concerns), and offers practical, responsive strategies to leverage educational and community resources. As mentoring programs continue to consider how to best serve young people who may be disengaged from school, key takeaways from the RC Initiative outline useful strategies to foster positive educational outcomes.

Available at: https://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/filer_public/70/fa/70fad636-ef2c-4968-9eed-91c23a441f46/cis_brief_2023_16.pdf

Youth and the Juvenile Justice System: 2022 National Report

- prepared by the National Center for Juvenile Justice

Youth and the Juvenile Justice System: 2022 National Report is the fifth edition of a comprehensive report on youth victimization, offending by youth, and the juvenile justice system. With this release, the report series has adopted a new name (the series was previously known as "Juvenile Offenders and Victims"), but the focus of the report remains unchanged: the report consists of the most requested information on youth and the juvenile justice system in the United States. The report draws on reliable data and relevant research to provide a comprehensive and insightful view of youth victims and offending by youth, and what happens to youth when they enter the juvenile justice system in the U.S.

Relevance for practitioners: A compilation of multiple, national data collections, the current *Youth and the Juvenile Justice System* report provides information on a variety of domains relevant for the mentoring field. Youth-serving professionals and organizations know well the complex causes that often contribute to delinquent behaviors and increase the risk that a young person will become involved in the juvenile justice system and so, will find this a helpful reference in growing their understanding of both historical and current trends. This report is particularly useful in its rigorous – yet accessible – detailing of intersecting areas such as school dropout rates, mental health, substance use trends, and teen birth rates. Practitioners will find additional resources listed at the end of the report where they may access data archives, learn more about current research, and find the most up-to-date statistical information on the juvenile justice system and related outcomes. A treasure trove of information for programs offering mentoring to youth involved with the juvenile justice system, or anyone interested in learning more about their needs.

Available at: https://www.ncjfcj.org/publications/youth-and-the-juvenile-justice-system-2022-national-report/

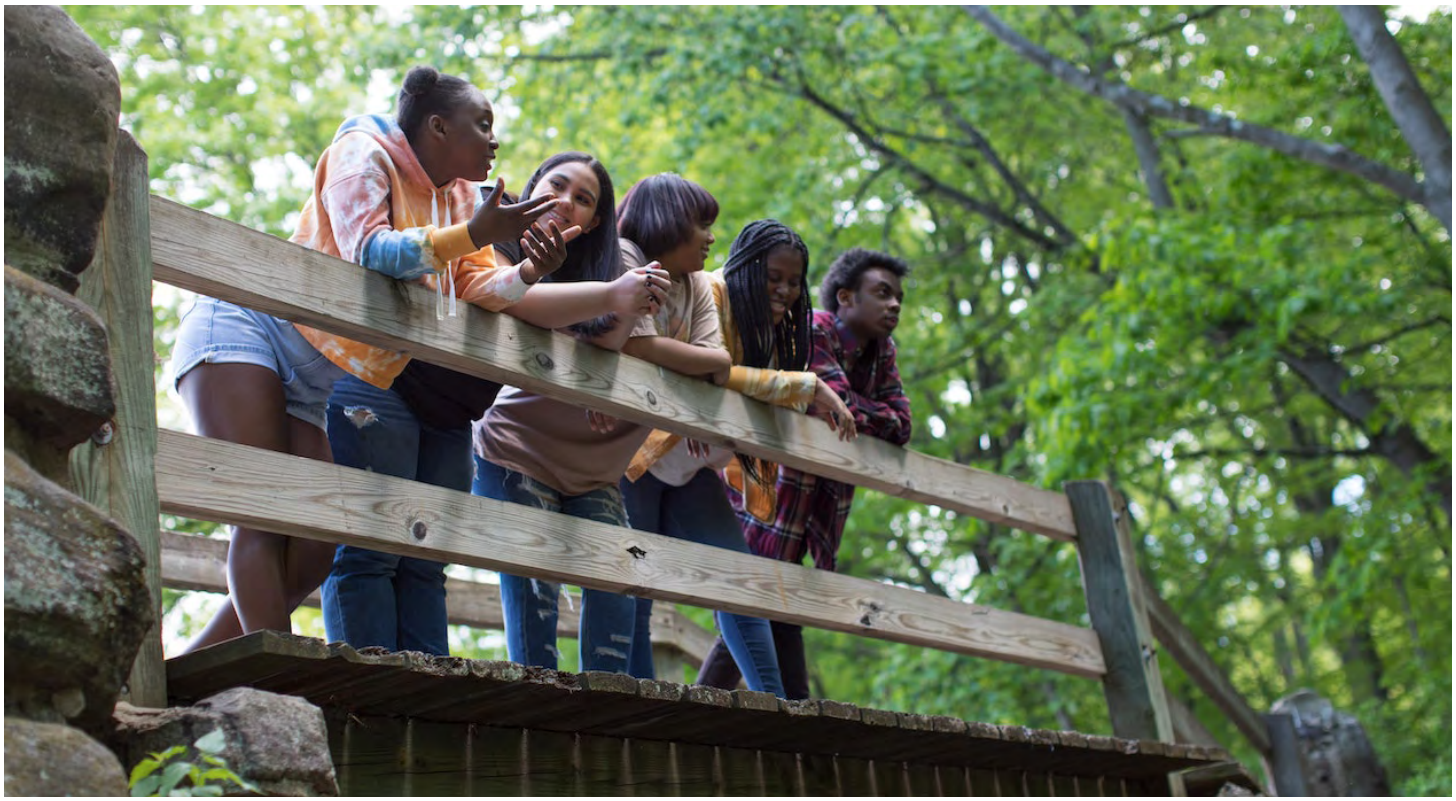
RECENT RESEARCH BOARD PUBLICATIONS AND TOOLS

New Resource on Mentoring Youth in Rural Settings

Research Board members Katie Edwards and Crystal Aschenbrener examine existing literature and what it can tell us about the efficacy and scope of mentoring in rural settings in this evidence review. Although research which rigorously evaluates program implementation and youth outcomes remains lacking, current studies indicate that both formal and informal rural mentoring experiences demonstrate promise to facilitate positive outcomes. The review includes implications for practice, such as leveraging unique community assets, and prioritizing service delivery to youth experiencing marginalization in the rural context. An informative read for those serving youth in rural settings or those interested in broadening program reach beyond suburban and urban communities.

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resource/mentoring-youth-in-rural-settings/

VIEW RESOURCE



ASK A RESEARCHER!

Each issue, we'll end the newsletter by answering a question that was sent to us or brought up in one of our NMRC Office Hours sessions. Today's question was asked in the January Office Hours session with Dr. Gabe Kuperminc.

Q: We are just now starting to think more deeply about tracking outcomes in our program. Unfortunately, we missed the window at the beginning of the year to do "pre" measurement of youth outcomes. Our kids are already matched with mentors and working on their goals and challenges. Is it too late for us to evaluate outcomes at all? Or is it possible to do only a "post" measurement of gains when the year ends? Has that ship sailed for our program? Or is there a way to make post-only measurement valid and meaningful?

Dr. Kuperminc: As a general rule, it is best to collect survey data for an evaluation in a pre-post design – in other words, each youth should typically complete a survey that includes measures of the outcomes your program is seeking to change **before** joining the program, and then retake a survey containing those same questions **after** the program ends (or at some specified point in time, e.g., 6 or 12 months after the "pre-test"). Calculating the difference between youths' "pretest" and "posttest" scores allows the evaluator to estimate how much the youth has changed throughout the course of the program. It's also recommended to follow the same procedure not just for program participants, but also for a comparison group of youth who are not participants … but that's for another conversation.

Sometimes, though, collecting pretest data is not possible, for example, when the program starts before you're able to design and start implementing the evaluation. If that is the case, the next best approach might be to use what evaluators call a "retrospective pretest-posttest" design. The idea is that you ask the participant to focus on their beliefs, attitudes, or skills at a particular point in time. For example, the survey you administer at the end of the program would present questions with directions something like, "Think back to September last year when you started this program and tell us how much you would have agreed with each statement **before being in the program**." After responding to those questions, the next set would include the same questions, but this time with directions something like, "**Now that you have completed the program**, please tell us how much you agree with each statement **now**."

It's also worth mentioning that the retrospective pretest-posttest design can also be useful when program participants have little awareness or knowledge of a topic before learning about it in the program. For example, imagine a program that teaches problem solving strategies. At the pretest, the participants might answer that they are pretty good at problem solving; however, once they learn about specific strategies, they might come to the conclusion at the end of the program that they still have a few things to learn (and their posttest scores could even look worse than the pretest scores!). In cases like this, where a true pretest is unlikely to give an accurate assessment, a retrospective pretest-posttest design could provide a more accurate picture of how much the participants have learned!

For additional learnings on retrospective pretest-posttest design, check out the resources listed below:

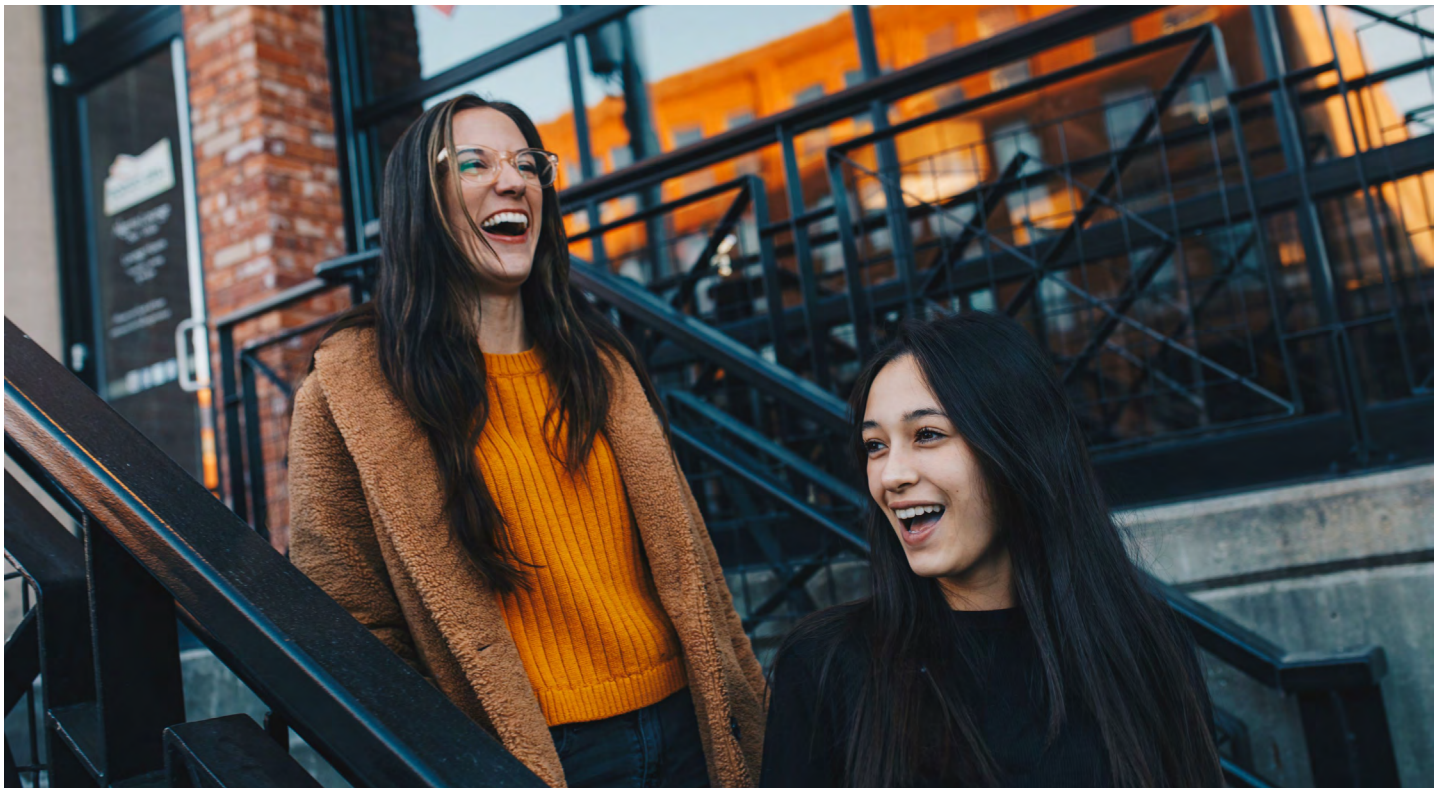
- Allen, J., & Nimon, K. (2007). A review of the retrospective pretest: Implications for performance improvement evaluation and research. *Workforce Education Forum*. 34. 36-56. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236784060_A_review_of_the_retrospective_pretest_Implications_for_performance_improvement_evaluation_and_research/link/5dba1d1392851c8180192a46/download

- Cors, R., Bell, C. (2022, May 19). Retrospective pre-posttests are ideal for evaluating many informal learning experiences. https://www.informalscience.org/news-views/retrospective-pre-posttests-are-ideal-evaluating-many-informal-learning-experiences

- Gouldthorpe, J. L., & Israel, G. D. "Capturing Change: Comparing Pretest-Posttest and Retrospective Evaluation Methods." *EDIS* 2013, no. 1 (January 31, 2013). https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-wc135-2013

- Hamidi, F., Moulton, A., Grimes, S., Grimes, S., & Coy, A. (2020). Using Retrospective Surveys to Assess the Impact of Participating in an Afterschool Maker Learning Program on Youth. 2020 ASEE Virtual Annual Conference Content Access Proceedings, 35470. https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2--35470

- Little, T. D., Chang, R., Gorrall, B. K., Waggenspack, L., Fukuda, E., Allen, P. J., & Noam, G. G. (2020). The retrospective pretest–posttest design redux: On its validity as an alternative to traditional pretest–posttest measurement. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 44(2), 175–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025419877973



NMRC ANNOUNCEMENTS

Looking to start workforce development in your mentoring program?

Eager to strengthen the ways you offer support to opportunity youth?

We are enthused to announce our **New Workforce Development Guide**.

Key Features:

- Specific challenges opportunity youth face
- Required workforce skills for now and the future
- Best practices for mentoring programs
- Holistic approaches

VIEW RESOURCE