

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

REACH One Child at a Time
McKinney Independent School District
McKinney, TX

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Key words: mentor, community volunteers, business partners

REACH One Child at a Time

Funding Sources

McKinney Independent School District (ISD)
McKinney ISD Education Foundation
McKinney Texas Business Community

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

\$6,000 per year—funding received from McKinney ISD
Expenses: campus materials, project supplies for students
Training: provided by MISD personnel, community volunteers, consultants
Fundraising activities through: McKinney Education Foundation

Scope and Setting

The on-campus mentoring program allows students to work with their mentor in a classroom or at a location within the school at least one hour each school week. The mentors attend school activities as they are invited by the student/campus.

Staffing Pattern

- One full-time administrator, two part-time administrative assistants—MISD employees
- Project staff are employees of McKinney ISD. REACH is one of the responsibilities of the McKinney ISD Partners in Education department.
- Community members volunteer at least one hour weekly during the school day. These community volunteers and McKinney ISD employees/staff represent our diverse student population.

Population Served

- Number of students, subjects, or participants:
350 students, 300 mentors
- Description of project participants (ages, grades, demographics, etc.):
Pre K – 12th grade
Attend McKinney ISD schools
Meet student participant selection criteria
- Participant selection criteria:
REACH participants are referred by a teacher, administrator, campus personnel, or by parent request. The Campus Referral Form is a guide to select students that can benefit from having a mentor. The student is identified, and the parent/guardian is contacted and informed that the student has the opportunity to participate in the mentor program. Upon obtaining permission, the student is contacted and asked if he/she would like to be a part of the program. Students may also be referred by the municipal or county court.

Project Origination

As a classroom teacher in 2006, Ms. Cowlshaw, Project Director, saw the need for students to have an advocate, not a buddy. Students needed someone on a consistent basis to provide a source of support and to hold the student accountable. She asked herself how she could develop an opportunity to “REACH” our students. Ms. Cowlshaw developed a plan for training, reached out to the community and the McKinney ISD, and established REACH. Ms. Cowlshaw developed a long-standing relationship

with the community and local business. She saw the need for the two to connect. Our partnerships have provided for our business partners to be a working solution to keeping our children in school.

REACH is a campus-based mentoring program designed to cultivate self-esteem and self-confidence into a child's life while instilling a motivation to learn and improve personal and social skills. Our mentors become role models that reinforce the importance of an education and build a relationship with their student. By reaching one child at a time, we are changing lives of hundreds of children a year.

Issues Addressed

Student support through the development of a relationship with a caring adult.
Students developing a sense of positive inner being and self-worth.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

- Improved grades
- Fewer discipline referrals
- Increased attendance
- The support and guidance of a caring adult who is not a family member or teacher
- Increased self-esteem and the motivation to succeed
- Respect for self and others
- Enthusiasm to stay in school and be a part of the school culture
- Reinforcement of coping and problem-solving skills

Strategies and/or Interventions

A mentor may be a role model, but a true mentor does not ask another person to “be like me.” Rather, a mentor helps a student discover who he/she is and what he/she wishes to be.

REACH mentors assist students in the development and utilization of life skills. They provide input each week regarding school progress personal growth, working/playing with others, and relationship building. Our mentors teach our students the importance of work ethic, goal setting, and being part of a team.

Interventions are developed with the student, preparing the mentee to problem solve, advocate for themselves, and become self-sufficient and self-defining.

Project Timeline

Mentors process appropriate volunteer application forms during the summer.

Referrals are available at the campus at the beginning of each school year.

- Mentors participate with students during the school year upon application completion and parent permission
- Once assigned, mentors meet with students during scheduled one-hour sessions for the course of the school year (September – May)

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project

REACH mentors submit the appropriate documentation through the McKinney ISD. Our mentors bring with them a caring heart and willingness to engage with their mentee. There is no level of expertise, but mentors must be willing to give consistently of their time, energy, and have a desire to assist a young person REACH for his/her full potential.

Volunteers complete the McKinney ISD application and are validated through a background check.

Outcomes and Achievements

REACH is designed to cultivate self-esteem and self-confidence into a child's life while instilling motivation to learn and improve personal and social skills. REACH volunteers reinforce the importance of an education and build relationships with students. REACH one student at a time is changing the lives of hundreds of children a year. REACH strives to:

- Provide leadership to students served.
- Development students' interpersonal skills through relationships with their mentors.
- Student develops direction to set expectations and goals.
- Encourage participation in school sports, activities, and clubs.
- Engage students in their own well-being.

Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates

- Students attend school so that they can spend quality time with their mentors.
- Students request the relationship continue with their mentor the next school year
- Students with positive and impactful relationships with adults at their school maintain good attendance and grades are improved. The significance of a relationship with someone that demonstrates care and concern for him/her.
- Relationships developed with a mentor may last for a year, several years, or even a lifetime.

Current Status of Project

The project is active at all McKinney ISD campuses PreK-12th grade. Participation increases with district and community support.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

I have been an active mentor for six years with this project. My mentee has remained the same since she was a seventh-grade student. She lived with her great grandmother until her death last year. This young lady was responsible for the household, preparing food for both of them and stretching the household budget. It was important to make sure that they had extra food when school was not in session. As her mentor, I have been her school advocate, as well as her life coach. During her sophomore year of high school, there were many challenges at home with the death of her great grandmother and fitting in at school. The decision to move her to a different campus was the first of many good decisions that we made together. She has been enrolled in the JROTC program and eHigh credit recovery. The JROTC program has provided her the opportunity to flourish physically and mentally. Her self-esteem has reached a new level! The eHigh program has allowed her to recover loss credits and anticipate graduation this school year. I look forward to handing her the high school diploma that she worked hard to earn as she walks the stage in June. Her dream is to join the U.S. Navy and become a nurse! Assisting my mentee in pursuing this dream has been significant to me also. She takes great pride when introducing me to her schoolmates and friends when I visit the campus. Her teachers are in regular contact and provide ongoing support and encouragement. My responsibility is to encourage her to REACH, dream, grow and develop. I seek volunteers for the program and encourage others to give of themselves to our children. This is one of the most rewarding experiences that one could have. Our goal is to provide mentors for any student/parent that makes a request.

Lessons Learned

- Mentors play an essential role in the lives of our students. They are student advocates and someone who will listen to what students need to say.
- REACH is a community-wide solution that reaches out to all students in our schools.
- Mentors are a valuable link between school achievement and success.

- To REACH one, we teach one. Our mentees may become mentors, becoming a PAL (Peer Assistance and Leadership), and reading to younger children.
- Students take an interest in themselves when we show them that we genuinely care.
- Interpersonal growth leads to self-confidence, good grades, high school graduation and higher education/training.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

Creating a community/school based program will require a continuous commitment of people, time, and financial resources. REACH was established through direct communication with the school and community. Community partners have an established interest in “all” children in McKinney ISD. Local industry and business invest in the program by providing the opportunity for their employees to mentor during their workday. They are active participants in the fund-raising events including donations and other financial support. Developing a school/community-based program provides an opportunity for a relationship to foster and allows all citizens to be involved and take an active role in the success of our schools and in our children. Our “village” walks hand in hand with our campus district personnel, campus administrators, teachers, counselors, campus staff, parents, and students to create a true culture of learning and growing. The responsibility for caring for our children resides in the entire community.