

My Brother's Keeper Mentoring Program

Austin Independent School District

2016–2017

About My Brother's Keeper (MBK)

In 2014, President Obama established [My Brother's Keeper](#) (MBK) to confront ongoing opportunity gaps facing young men of color and to make certain they can reach their full potential. Through the national My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge, more than 250 communities in all 50 states adopted innovative approaches to strengthen supports for boys and young men of color. The Greater Austin Area MBK Initiative also committed to assisting males of color in reaching their full potential through supports designed to eliminate disparities and create equity.

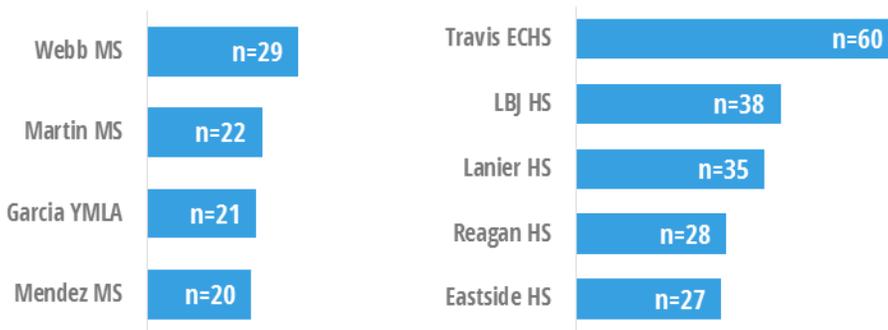
How did AISD respond to the national MBK Challenge?

Following evidenced-based recommendations from [MENTOR](#) to address chronic absenteeism, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) created its own MBK Success Mentors Initiative. This initiative intended to reduce chronic absenteeism by connecting students with trained and caring mentors. In this effort, program staff recruited and trained mentors and matched them with students who were chronically absent in the prior school year or approaching chronic absenteeism in the current school year. Mentors may have included adults working within the school, adult volunteers from outside the school, and older student peers within the same school. Each school hosted a program kick-off event in the fall semester, at which students met their mentors and got to know each other in a celebratory and fun environment. Program staff recommended that mentors reach out to their mentees in some capacity three times per week. The estimated cost of the program in 2016–2017 was \$111,118.

Who participated in AISD's MBK Success Mentors Initiative?

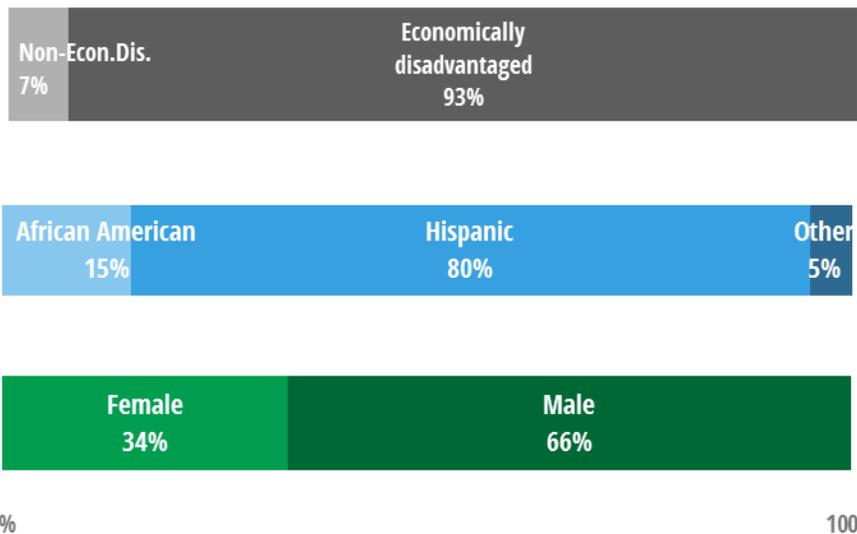
AISD piloted the MBK program at three campuses during the 2015–2016 school year and expanded to an additional six campuses in the 2016–2017 school year. MBK program schools included Garcia Young Men's Leadership Academy; Martin, Mendez, and Webb Middle Schools; Eastside, Lanier, and LBJ High Schools; and Reagan and Travis Early College High Schools (Figure 1). Approximately 280 students were mentored, and mentoring support focused on students in the 6th ($n=82$) and 9th ($n=168$) grades. Although the national program focused on young men of color, AISD's MBK program also supported young women who were experiencing chronic absenteeism (Figure 2). Most MBK mentees (93%) also were categorized as being economically disadvantaged.

Figure 1
Most MBK Mentoring Program participants were in high school.



Source. AISD student enrollment and MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

Figure 2
Most MBK Mentoring Program participants were economically disadvantaged, African American or Hispanic, and male.



Source. AISD student enrollment and MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

How did MBK mentors and mentees experience the mentoring program?

At the end of the school year, MBK mentors and mentees were asked to complete a survey to provide information about their mentoring experiences. The surveys asked questions related to program implementation and perceived outcomes for mentees. Sixty-two percent of adult mentors and 94% of peer mentors completed a program survey. Seventy-two percent of MBK mentees completed a program survey.

On the mentor surveys at the end of the school year, most MBK adult mentors and peer mentors reported they were trained, felt prepared, and felt supported by MBK program staff (Figures 3 and 4). To support the mentoring experiences, the MBK program staff provided training for both adult and peer mentors at the beginning of the program.

MBK Program Data Collection and Analysis

What data were used to examine program outcomes?

Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) staff collected qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to student program participation and attendance outcomes. District information systems provided students' demographic, school enrollment, and attendance data. Participating students and mentors completed surveys regarding their experiences with the program. Program managers supported mentors to record their program participation sessions as they occurred. Descriptive and comparative analyses were performed to examine program implementation, participation and student attendance outcomes.

What is chronic absenteeism and why is it important?

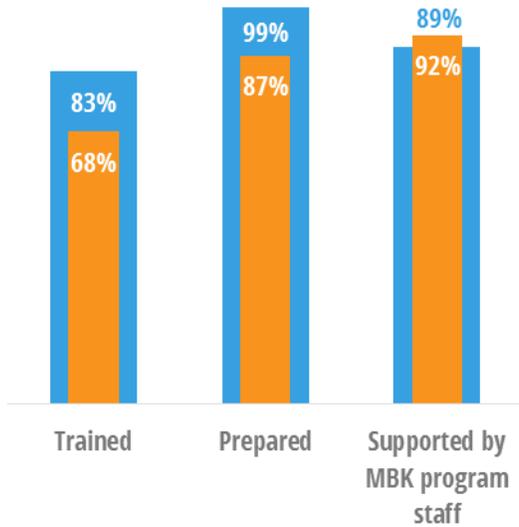
Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing at least 10% of school days in a school year for any reason, excused or unexcused.

Poor school attendance is a strong predictor of whether a student will drop out of school before high school graduation. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported chronic absenteeism in middle and high school was associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of dropping out. Dropping out of high school, which chronically absent students were more likely than their not chronically absent peers to experience, often resulted in poverty, poor health, and involvement in the criminal justice system.



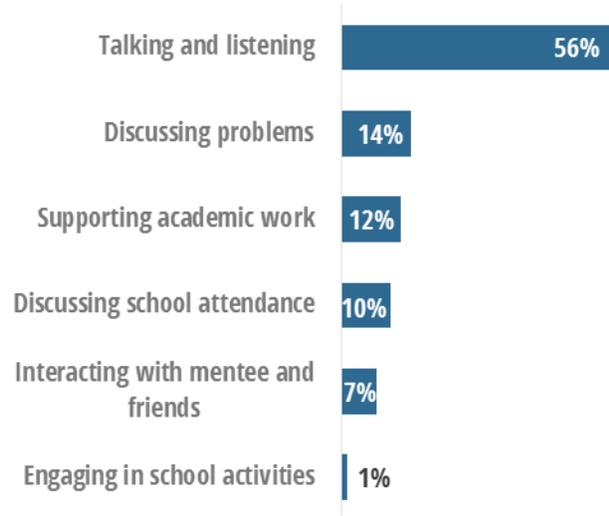
Each campus also had a program contact at each school and two district-level program coordinators dedicated to supporting mentors and mentees throughout the school year.

Figure 3
Most MBK **adult mentors** and **peer mentors** reported they were trained, prepared, and supported by MBK staff.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Surveys, 2016–2017

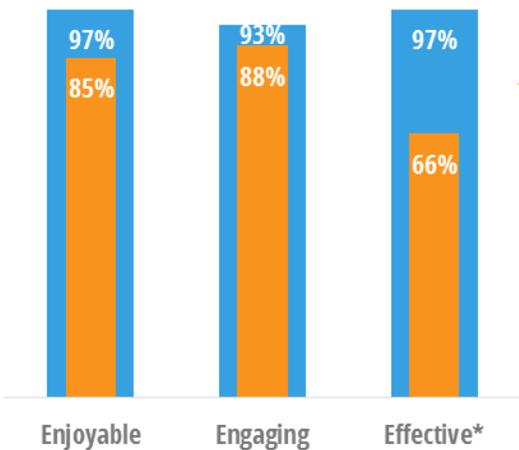
Figure 4
Most MBK mentors and mentees spent their time in general conversation. School attendance was not often discussed.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Surveys, 2016–2017

MBK mentors reported positive outcomes for their mentees (Figure 5). Most mentors reported the mentoring experiences to be enjoyable and engaging for their mentees. However, a significantly greater percentage of MBK peer mentors than of adult mentors reported the program to be effective on their respective campuses. This finding may be explained in terms of the developmental perspectives of adults and adolescents. Open-ended survey responses indicated that the adult mentors identified relationship development, academic improvement, and attendance increases as indicators of program effectiveness. In contrast, peer mentors reported the development of friendships and their own personal leadership skills as the primary indicators of program effectiveness.

Figure 5
A significantly greater percentage of **peer mentors** than of **adult mentors** rated the program as extremely or mostly effective.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Surveys, 2016–2017

* Statistically significant ($p < .05$)

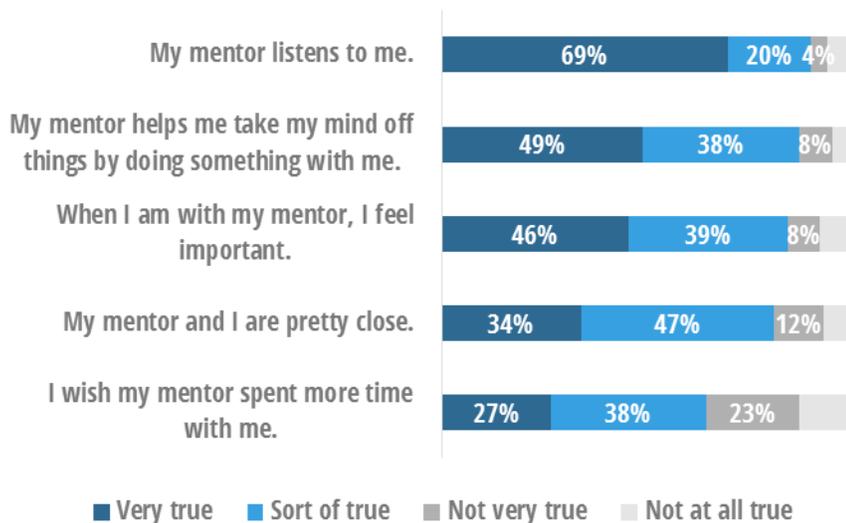
"While investigating causes of absence, we discovered that my mentee had been bullied...We were able to solve the problem and my mentee began feeling more safe while at school."

"I think the greatest success of the MBK program was the influence I had on my mentee, and how I helped him want to attend his classes."

MBK Program Surveys

On the mentee surveys at the end of the school year, most MBK mentees reported positive experiences (Figure 6). They highly rated survey items (i.e., rated items as being *very true*) indicating their mentor listened to them and helped them take their minds off things. However, lower percentages of mentees (27%) had a ratings of *very true* when asked if they were pretty close to their mentor or wanted to spend more time with their mentor.

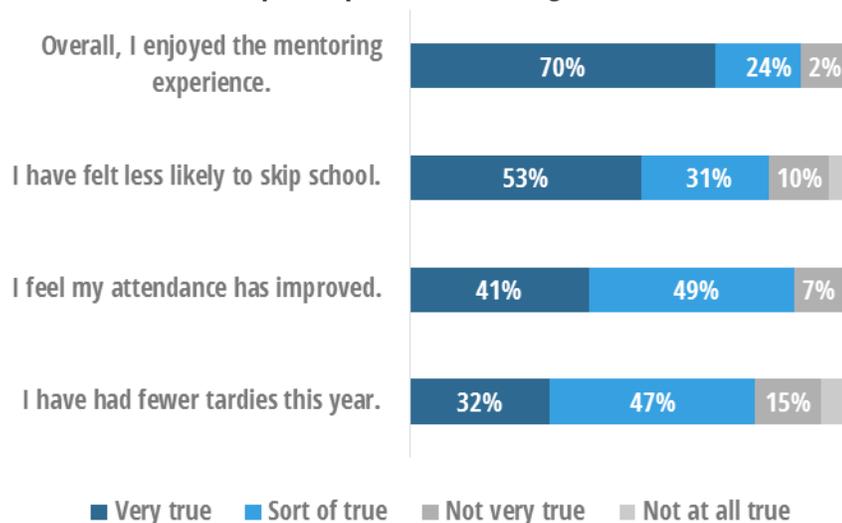
Figure 6
Most MBK mentees reported positive mentoring experiences.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Surveys 2016–2017

Overall, MBK mentees reported the mentoring experience was enjoyable (Figure 7). Many of them felt less likely to skip school or be late to class. A little more than half of the MBK mentees indicated it was *very true* that their overall attendance had improved.

Figure 7
Most MBK mentees reported positive mentoring outcomes.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Surveys 2016–2017

MBK Survey of Mentors

Adult and peer mentors were asked to complete an online program survey at the end of the school year. The survey included questions about their implementation of the program, their mentoring relationships and mentee outcomes they attributed to the mentoring experience. Sixty-two percent of MBK adult mentors and 94% of peer mentors completed a program survey. Mentor survey respondents were determined to be representative of adult and peer mentors within and outside the school.

MBK Survey of Mentees

Mentees enrolled in May 2017 were asked to complete an online program survey at the end of the school year. The survey included questions about their mentoring relationship and outcomes they attributed to the mentoring experience. Seventy-two percent of MBK mentees completed a program survey and were determined to be representative of the student group.



How often did MBK mentors and mentees meet?

Throughout Fall 2016, program staff identified program participants, recruited and trained mentors, and held mentoring kick-off events. Program staff recommended that mentors reach out to their mentees in some capacity three times per week for the duration of the school year. Mentoring outreach could include one-on-one sessions lasting for 30 minutes, quicker check-ins lasting only a few minutes, text messages, and phone calls. Program outreach services were to be tracked in a district data system and monitored by program coordinators. Of the 280 students identified as MBK mentees, mentoring sessions or check-ins were recorded for 81% of the program participants (Figure 8). It could not be determined whether services were not provided for 53 students or simply not recorded.

For mentees with recorded program information, mentoring services were provided for mentees between 1 and 80 times, with an average of 15 times during the year. Most often, mentees met three times with their mentor. The level of mentoring outreach varied between campuses. On average, MBK mentees at Reagan High School and Webb Middle School met with their mentors most often. Mentees with a mentor within their school typically met more often with their mentor than did those with an adult mentor external to the school or a peer mentor (Figures 9 through 11).

Figure 8

Mentoring sessions were recorded for 81% of the students listed as MBK program participants.

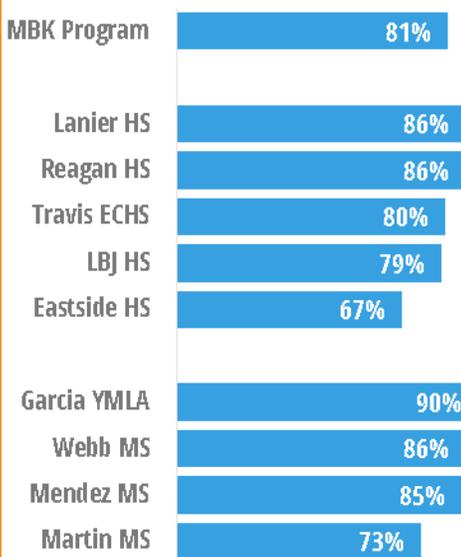
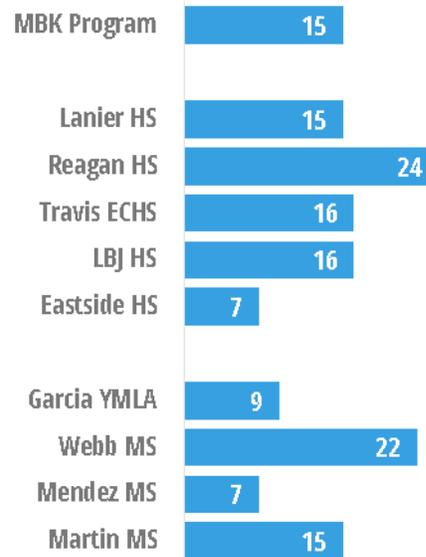


Figure 9

On average, MBK program participants met with their mentors 15 times during the school year.



Sources. AISD student enrollment and MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

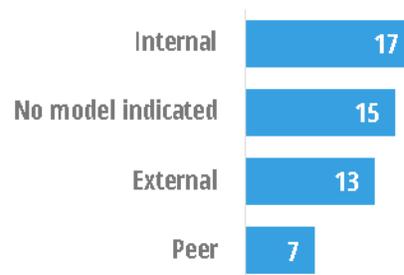
Figure 10

Most MBK mentees had an adult mentor within their school.



Figure 11

MBK mentees who had an adult mentor within their school met more often with their mentor, an average of 17 times.



Source. AISD MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™ provides research-informed standards for building and supporting quality youth mentoring programs. These standards address mentor training, the matching process, and relationship monitoring and support. Following these best practices, many studies show quality mentoring relationships have significant positive effects on young people in a variety of personal and academic ways.

Many studies of mentoring show a relationship between a child's involvement in a quality mentoring relationship and positive outcomes in school (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Mentees' feelings of closeness to their mentors were related to longer lasting mentoring relationships and better outcomes for the mentees (Dubois & Karcher, 2013). Additionally, mentee reports of closeness have been associated with academic and behavioral improvements after almost a year of mentoring. Students who met regularly with their mentors also were less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and less likely to skip class (Grossman, Resch, & Tierney, 2000).

What were the attendance outcomes for MBK mentees?

Improvement in MBK mentee attendance rates in the 2016–2017 school year was mixed among schools and by mentoring model type. Overall, 35% of all MBK mentees experienced improved attendance rates compared with their own performance in the prior school year. However, more than half of MBK mentees attending Eastside Memorial High School and Garcia Young Men's Leadership Academy experienced improved attendance rates in the 2016–2017 school year compared with their own attendance rates in the prior school year. A significantly greater percentage of mentees with a peer mentor had an improved attendance rate, compared with those who had an adult internal to their school. This should be interpreted with caution given that most mentees with a peer mentor attended Garcia YMLA, a school focused on developing leadership and academic success in young men, and other campus factors were not considered in the analysis.

Figure 12

More than half of MBK mentees attending Eastside High School and Garcia YMLA had improved attendance rates compared with their own attendance rates in the prior school year.

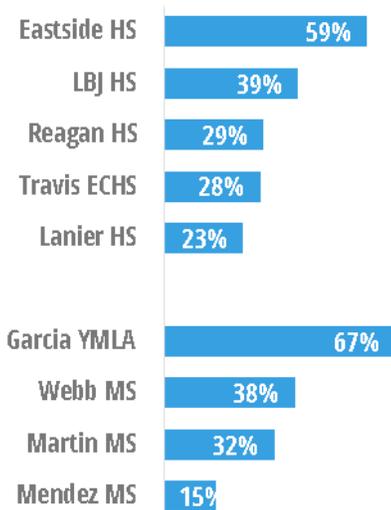
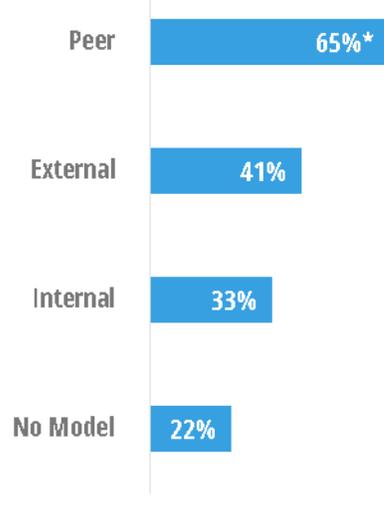


Figure 13

A significantly greater percentage of mentees with a peer mentor had an improved attendance rate compared with those who had an adult internal to their school.



Source. AISD student attendance and MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

Many MBK mentees continued to struggle with chronic absenteeism in the 2016–2017 school year. Overall, 58% of the MBK mentees were categorized as chronically absent at the end of the school year. However, fewer than half of MBK mentees at LBJ, Garcia, and Webb were categorized as being chronically absent (Figure 14). A significantly lower percentage of MBK mentees who had a peer mentor were considered chronically absent at the end of the school year compared with mentees with adult mentors (Figure 15). When students were asked about the reasons for their absences, they most often cited medical or dental reasons (38%) and over sleeping or being tired (26%).



Figure 14

Many MBK mentees were still struggling with chronic absenteeism at the end of the 2016–2017 school year.

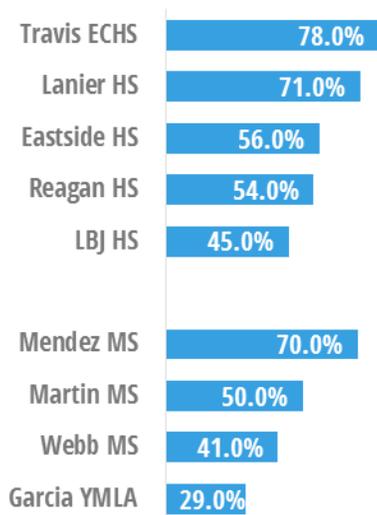
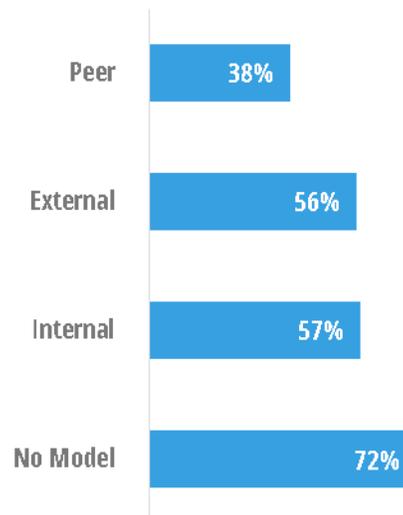


Figure 15

A significantly lower percentage of MBK mentees who had a peer mentor were considered chronically absent at the end of the school year compared with mentees who had adult mentors.



Source. AISD student attendance and MBK Mentoring Program records, 2016–2017

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results were mixed for this program in the first year of implementation. Staff identified large numbers of students struggling with chronic absenteeism and provided those students with a mentor. Mentees and mentors reported positive experiences with the program and perceived beneficial outcomes. However, improved attendance outcomes were not observed for many program participants. These mixed outcomes may be due to differences in ways students were selected to participate, delayed or limited program implementation on some campuses, variation in program record keeping, or other student/campus context factors. Benner and Wang (2014) found that student attendance rates may be negatively affected as students transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school because of differences in school-level structures and student behavioral engagement patterns during the adolescent years. Research studies also indicate longer mentoring relationships and feelings of closeness between the mentee and mentor are key predictors of positive school outcomes. Feeling of closeness take time to develop.

Continued examination of program implementation and mentoring relationships is recommended to identify best practices that may positively influence student outcomes. Further inquiry into program implementation practices and whether those practices meet mentoring standards may help to improve mentoring support and lead to improved outcomes for more mentees. Consistency in recording program services for students should be developed and closely monitored. The improvement in data quality will enhance program evaluation efforts to better determine program outcomes. The feasibility of continuing the mentoring support beyond a single school year should be explored and implemented, if possible, to increase the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will positively influence student outcomes.

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