



The Campaign for Mentoring at the Center for Youth Development of the United Way of Southeastern PA would like to announce it will be highlighting quality mentoring work in the region in its' new quarterly feature: The Mentoring Spotlight! Congratulations to our new winner: the Esperanza Academy Charter High School. Check out our interview with Christine Nieves , the Director of Grants and Donor Relations, and for more information on the program, or to volunteer, go to www.esperanza.us or call (215) 324-0746.

1. Tell us about your program. Where are you located? What population are you providing services to?

In 2007, Esperanza Academy Charter High School (EA) began its mentoring program out of a need to provide students with the benefits of a supportive mentor to address personal life challenges, improve academics, social interactions, and at-risk issues. Students at our school represent both the needs and potential of our Hunting Park

neighborhood in North Philadelphia. Our student body overall is at-risk, but students even further at risk are targeted for the program. The program focuses on the incoming 9th graders considered most "at risk" based on "An Early Warning System" by Robert Balfanz et. al¹ that allows EA to target energies and resources on those with a 75% likelihood of drop-out according to risk-factors. Students who participate include pregnant or parenting students, those with incarcerated parents, mental health, behavioral, or substance abuse issues, transitional or homeless, language challenges, those with low initial academic scores, as well as those who want to achieve personal goals.

At the start of every year, faculty members are matched up with one or more students to provide support via weekly meetings. The mentor's objective is to help students to grow in areas including accountability, relationship building, identifying needs and resources to support students' achievement, career guidance and an individualized goal plan. Nearly 160 students of the total 720 student population participate each year.

2. Is there a special story about a mentoring pair you would like to share? A Mentor or Mentee who's life you have seen improve since joining the program? Tell us about them.

Kevin, an autistic student who had spent all his previous education in a self contained classroom, suddenly he found himself at EA with 23 other students and the hustle of changing classes each period. His mentor worked with him after school, modeling different social scenarios he might encounter and helping him to build confidence. He slowly worked his way from small group settings to now eating in the cafeteria with nearly 160 students, something that was previously frightening! Focusing on the task at hand, changing classes with minimal disruption, and building friendships are all outcomes of his participation in the mentoring program that contribute to his ability to flourish as a person and continue to succeed academically.

¹ "An Early Warning System" Balfanz et al, Educational Leadership October 2007, Volume 65, Number 2.

3. Have you reached a benchmark or significant mile stone recently? Are you employing new techniques? Starting a new program?

Since 2004, Esperanza has seen a dramatic decrease in the number of reported behavior incidents by 26.5% and a decrease in tardiness by 57.6% despite a steadily increasing student size, and decreasing failure rates, no doubt in part to the mentoring program. 100% of students who participate remain in the program more than 6 months (most for the full year). Approximately 87% demonstrate academic progress and move on to the next grade.

In the coming year, EA will look to recruit volunteers, parents, and other adults affiliated with Esperanza's network to serve as mentors and improve upon training and best-practices. Esperanza, the parent agency of EA, also just received a multi-state mentoring award to strengthen mentoring programs throughout the nation through capacity building and best practices, of which EA's program will be one.

If your mentoring program would like to be highlighted, please email Kwilson@uwsepa.org .