

Mentors in Toledo Schools 2014 - 2015

Evaluation Report

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Background

The Mentors in Toledo Schools program was initiated in 2012 as a social action project by a suburban religious institution, Temple Shomer Emunim. Volunteer Coordinator Jay Mirrow led the program with the support of Partners in Education (PIE), a local education support agency. The program operated in McKinley Elementary School during the first year, and expanded to Larchmont and Sherman Elementary schools during the second year. Old Orchard Elementary school was added during the third year (described in this report), and more schools intend to bring in the program in the future.

Darrell Morris of Appalachian State University has conducted significant research regarding tutoring programs geared toward early readers. Morris (2006) suggests that tutoring/mentoring programs can be successful if the program incorporates a number of features, including:

1. Students having prolonged interaction (<1 year) with the same tutor/mentor during the school year
2. Program features that foster tutor/mentor training, supervision, and school support
3. Quality relationships between the tutor/mentor and the students
4. Having a paid volunteer coordinator in place.

The Mentors in Toledo Schools program possesses these key attributes, and is therefore well-positioned to contributing to improvements in academic achievement and school engagement. A 2013 report¹ summarized the success of the program over two years at McKinley Elementary School. Since then, the program has expanded into three other schools. This purpose of this report is to document the activities and outcomes related to the program during the 2014-15 school year.

¹ Beekey, Seay, Righi & Rosinski (2013). The effects of a literacy based volunteer mentoring program on early reading success for first and second grade students. (Background information contained in this report was used in the "Background" section of this report as well. Many thanks to the authors.)

Program Summary

The Mentors in Toledo Schools program operates based on the collaboration and coordination of classroom teachers, volunteer mentors, and the volunteer coordinator. Teachers recommend students in their class to be included in the program based on an observed need in one or more areas of language arts (i.e., reading, writing). Teachers also provide student-specific reading tasks—aligned with the classroom curriculum—for the mentors to complete with students during the mentoring sessions. The volunteer coordinator recruits and assigns mentors to students, and ensures that mentors are prepared to facilitate the tasks assigned for the students by their teachers. Mentoring sessions are conducted Monday through Thursday from 9:30 to 11:30 AM, except during school holidays and special events.

Mentoring information (e.g., location, time, student name, tasks) is recorded in a database, which tracks tutor/student meeting times, student behavior with the tutors, the teaching materials reviewed with each student, and allows for written tutor comments to the teacher regarding student performance and behavior. Mentors document the tasks that were accomplished, and evaluate the students' participation during the session using five categories: Uninterested, Behavior Issue, Distracted, Satisfactory, Enthusiastic. The mentors' feedback is shared with teachers and building principals on a daily basis, so the information can be used to guide future instruction.

Critical components of this program are the structural organization maintained by the database, the consistency of the tutoring, and the quality of the communication between teacher and tutor/mentor about students' work. Since teachers selected the work for the students to do with the tutors and they had feedback on the students' actual activity, teachers can accommodate the changing needs of the students over time.

2014 – 2015 Mentoring Activities

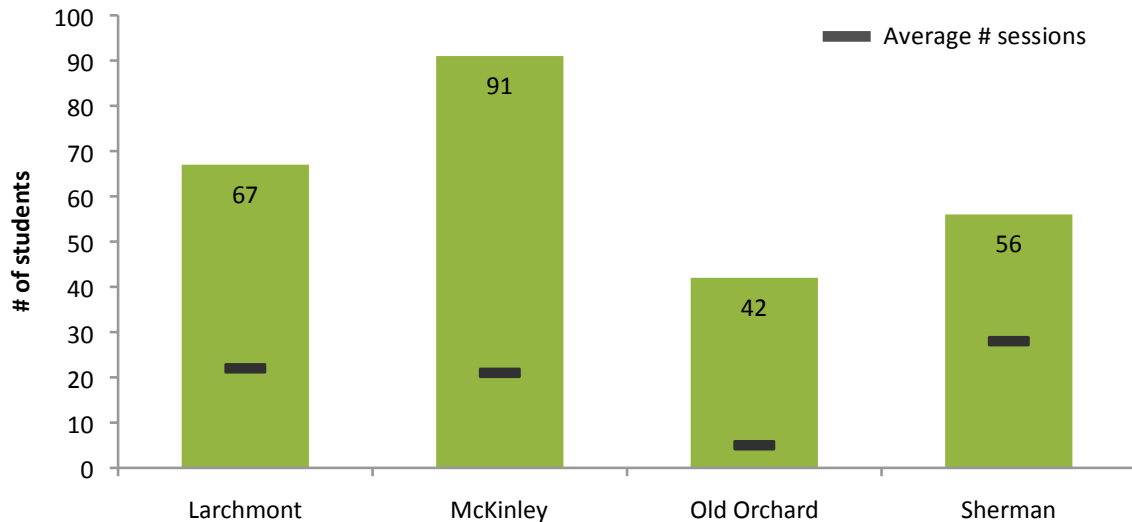
Mentors in Toledo Schools operated in four elementary schools during the 2014-15 school year: Larchmont, McKinley, Old Orchard, and Sherman. Mentoring occurred in most schools from October 2014 to May 2015, with the exception of Old Orchard, in which mentoring occurred from April to May 2015. A brief “by-the-numbers” view of the program is shown below.

Participating Classrooms	20
Mentoring Sessions	5,211
Students Mentored	256
Mentors	95
Average Sessions per Student	20
Average Sessions per Mentor	55

Of the twenty participating classrooms, seven were in McKinley Elementary School. It makes sense, therefore, that most students were mentored at McKinley Elementary School (see figure below). Only three classrooms in Sherman Elementary participated in the program, but many students from each class (an average of 19) participated. Despite having the fewest participating classrooms, students at Sherman Elementary participated in the most sessions, on average. Old Orchard Elementary started the program in the spring, which accounts for the relatively low number of sessions—students did not have the opportunity to participate in the same number of sessions during the school year.

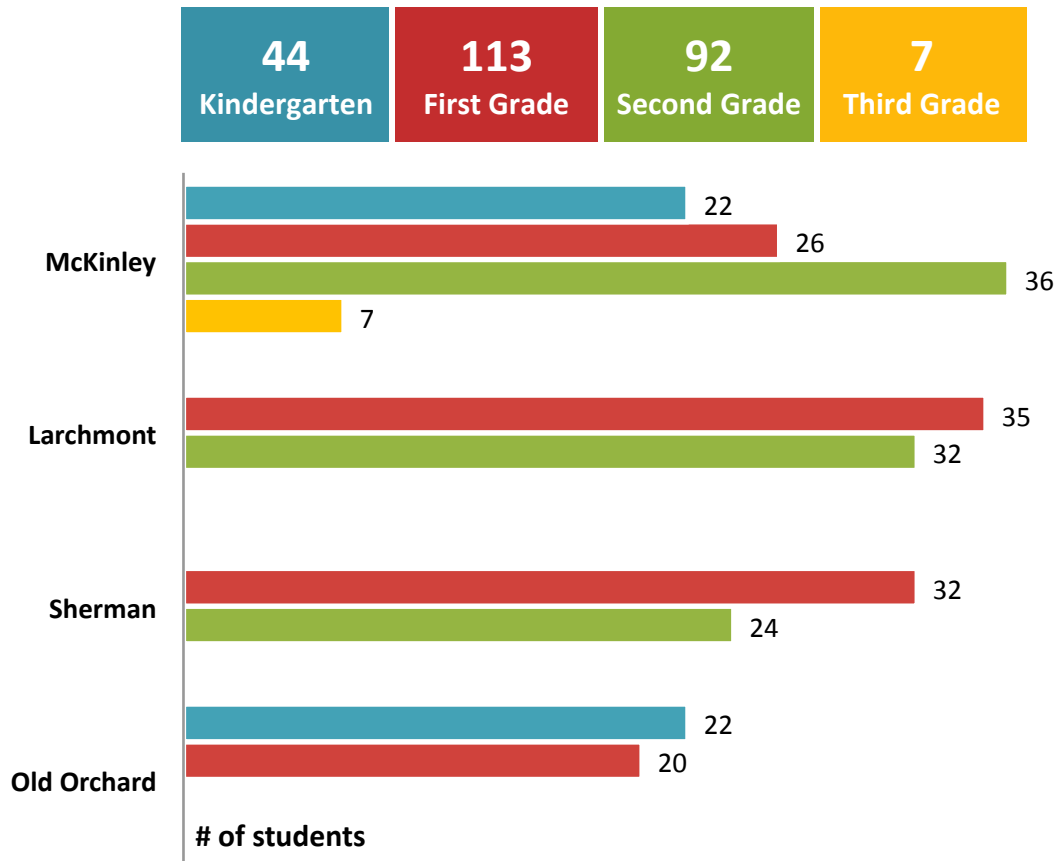
More students were mentored at McKinley than any other school

However, students at Sherman participated in the most sessions, on average



First and second grade students were mentored more often than kindergarten and third grade students, which is consistent with focus the program has had since its inception. The figure below illustrates the number of students mentored in each grade by school.

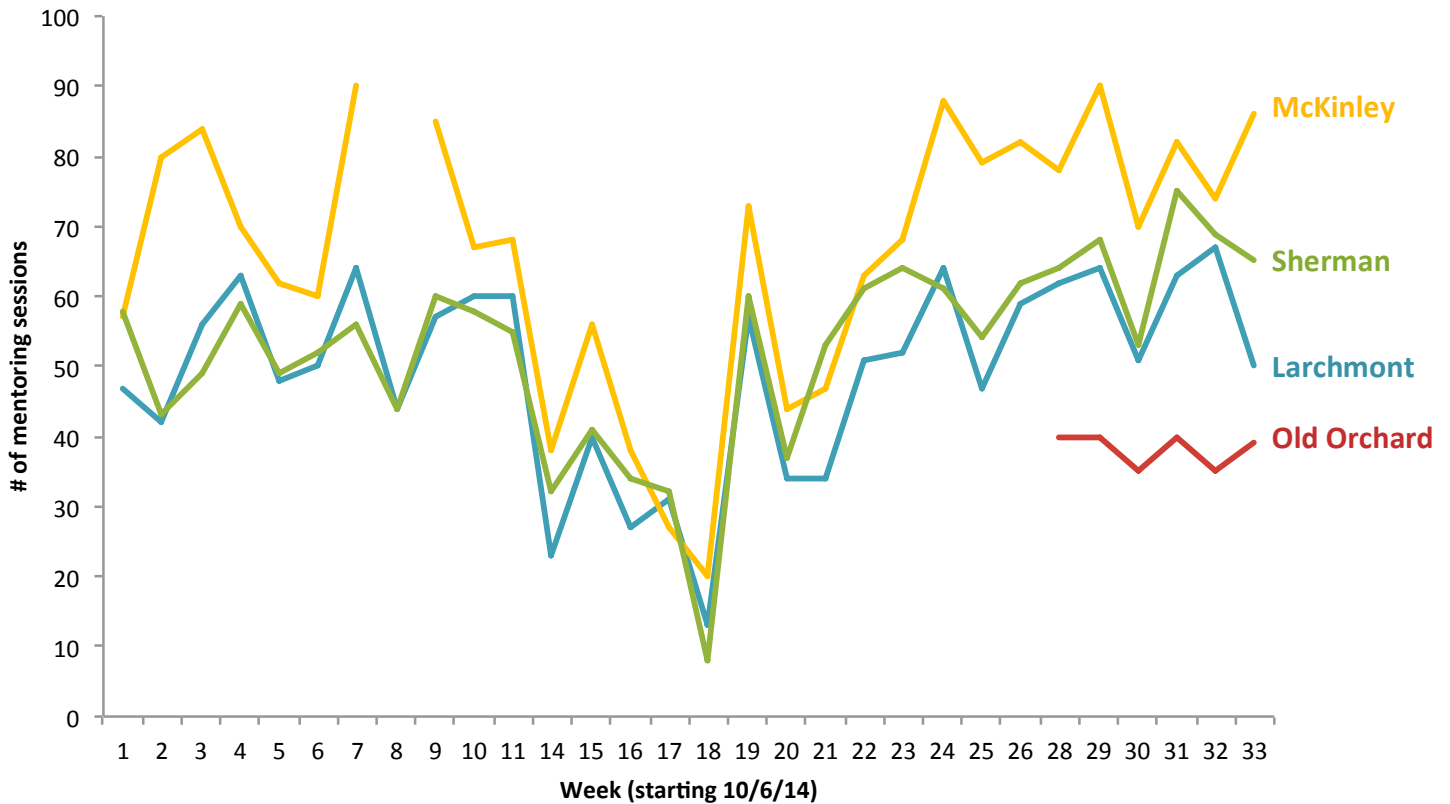
Mentoring was provided to first grade students more than any other grade



The number of mentoring sessions facilitated by a single mentor ranged from 1 to 289, with an average of 55 sessions. Most mentors (94%) served in just one school. However, many mentors facilitated sessions in more than one grade. Almost 40% of mentors facilitated sessions in two different grades.

Mentoring activity was highest at the beginning and end of the school year. As illustrated by the figure below, mentoring was less frequent from December to February.

Mentoring activity was highest at the beginning and end of the school year



Participating teachers provided mentors with a total of 22,898 reading tasks to complete during the mentoring activities. The most common tasks included spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, phonics, writing, fluency, and sight words. Mentors started or completed 16,434 (72%) of the tasks—6,464 tasks (28%) were not attempted.

Students demonstrated enthusiastic and satisfactory behavior during most of the mentoring sessions, according to the mentors’ evaluations. Of the 5,211 total mentoring sessions, students demonstrated “enthusiastic” or “satisfactory” behavior in 4,804 (92%) sessions.

Impact of Mentoring Activities on Student Reading Achievement

The impact of the Mentors in Toledo Schools program was determined using student data from the STAR Reading Assessment, which is completed by students in Toledo Public Schools at least three times each school year (fall, winter, and spring). A major limitation for this report is the relative unavailability of data from the Toledo Public School district for students enrolled in the mentoring program. Of the 256 students enrolled in the program during the 2014-15 school year, only 27 students had a full data set (i.e., data for fall, winter, and spring). The analyses that were conducted to determine the impact of the program were therefore limited. Future evaluation activities should be conducted in close concert with the TPS data team to ensure that all students in the mentoring program are represented in the TPS data system, and all relevant student data are provided.²

About the STAR Reading Assessment

The STAR Reading Assessment is focused on four major skills, which can be broken down into eleven domains. The table below includes the topics and domains measured by the assessment.

Topics and Domains included in the STAR Reading Assessment

Foundational Skills	Reading: Literature	Reading Information Text	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonics and Word Recognition • Fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Ideas and Details • Craft and Structure • Integration of Knowledge and Ideas • Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Ideas and Details • Craft and Structure • Integration of Knowledge and Ideas • Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

The assessment is a computer-adaptive test, which continually adjusts the difficulty of a child’s test by choosing each test question based on the child’s previous response. If the child answers a question correctly, the difficulty level of the next item is increased. If the child misses a question, the difficulty level is decreased. On average, students complete the Reading

² It is likely the case that most mentored students were not included in the database because they could not read independently, and therefore did not take the STAR Reading Assessment. In the future, TPS should provide STAR Reading and Early Literacy data for evaluation purposes.

Assessment in 15 minutes. The results of the assessment are used to monitor students’ literacy skills.³

Students’ responses on the STAR Assessment are most usefully reported as scaled scores, which take into account the students’ number of correct answers, and the difficulty of the attempted questions. Scaled scores can reliably be compared across students and between different time points, which makes them ideal for measuring growth over time, and comparing students in different conditions. Scaled scores for the Reading Assessment range from 0 to 1400. TPS uses a four-benchmark classification system to screen students throughout the year. The figure below includes the four categories and the way students are assigned to them. (A percentile refers to the percentage of students that scored lower than a particular student. A student would be placed in the “Intervention” category if they scored in the 15th percentile— i.e., better than 15% of others.)

Benchmarks Related to STAR Assessment

Urgent Intervention	Intervention	On Watch	At/Above Benchmark
<i>Below 10th Percentile</i>	<i>Below 25th Percentile</i>	<i>Below 40th Percentile</i>	<i>Above 40th Percentile</i>

In order to improve the analyses conducted for this evaluation, the TPS STAR Assessment data were cleaned and filtered in order to make more meaningful comparisons about the impact of the mentoring program. Students in grades K to 3 who attended Sherman, McKinley, Larchmont, and Old Orchard schools were selected from the original dataset in order to better match the students who participated in the mentoring program. The data cleaning resulted in 67 students enrolled in the program, and 285 “comparison” students who attended the same schools but did not participate in the mentoring program. The table on the next page includes a breakdown of students selected from the original dataset. Of these students, 202 non-mentoring students and 27 mentoring students had data for all three time points. These 229 students were included in the analyses. (Statistical tests confirmed that the 27 students were similar to the other 229 mentored students not represented in the analyses in terms of grade level and number of mentoring sessions.)

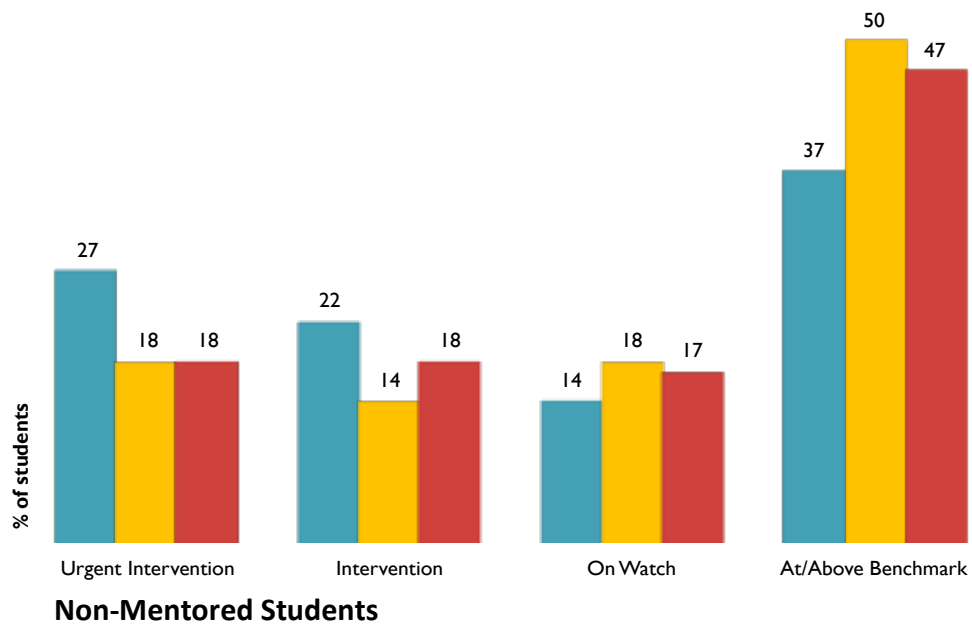
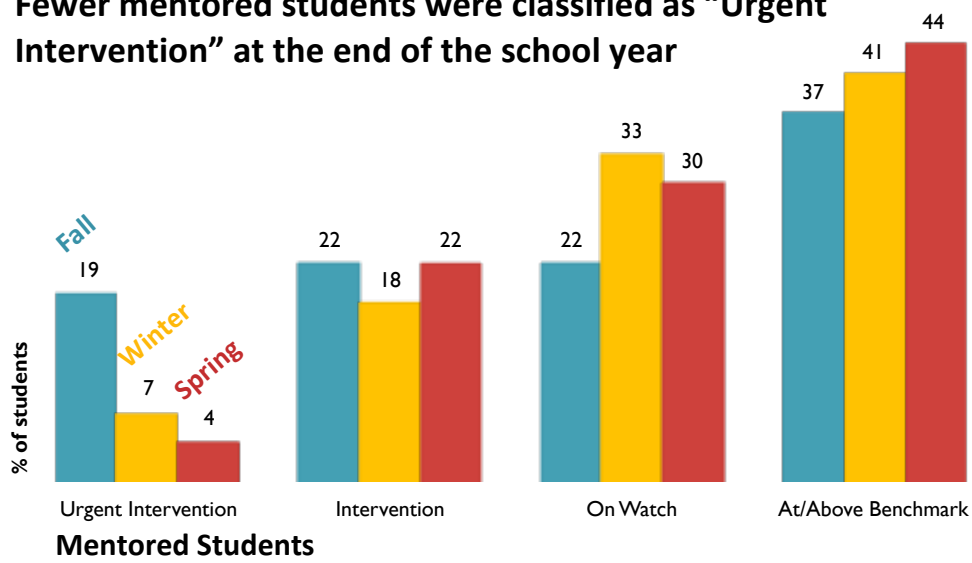
³ Characteristics of the STAR Reading Assessment were taken from the “Parents Guide to STAR Assessments, found at <http://www.renaissance.com/Resources/Parents>.

Students in grades K to 3 attending target schools

School	Non-mentored students	Mentored students
McKinley	21	19
Sherman	57	19
Larchmont	110	27
Old Orchard	97	2
TOTAL	285	67

The figures below illustrate the percentage of students (mentored and not mentored) within each benchmark classification across the three testing points.

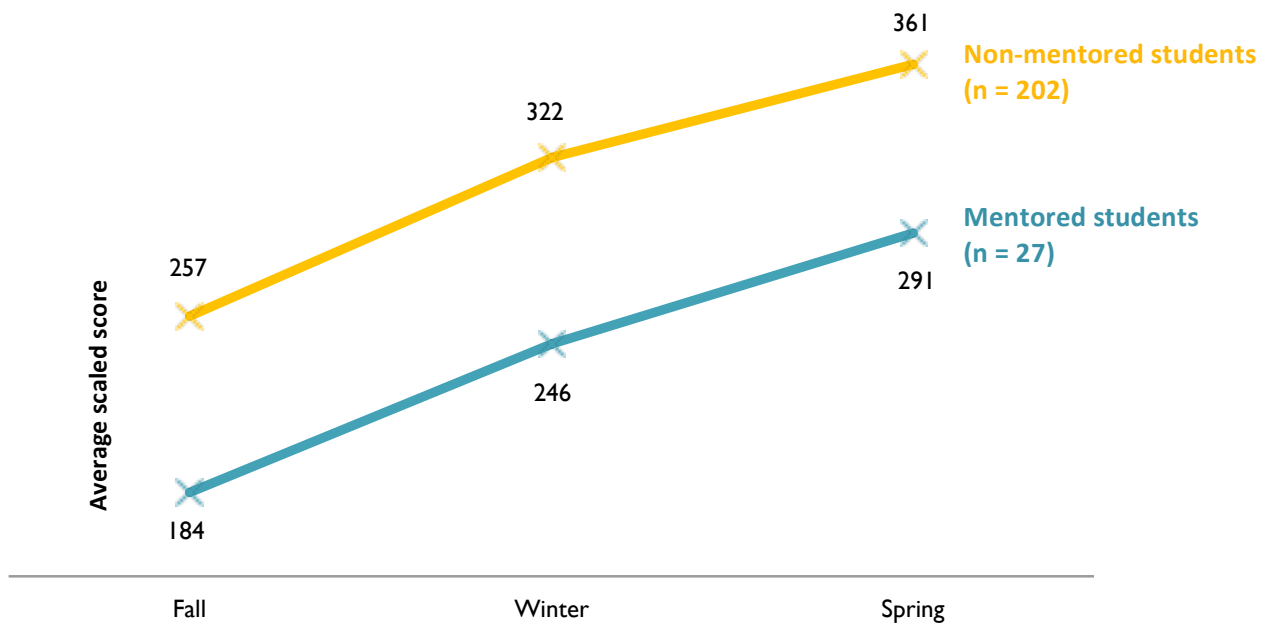
Fewer mentored students were classified as “Urgent Intervention” at the end of the school year



While a similar percentage of students between groups were classified as Intervention and At/Above Benchmark, relatively fewer mentored students were classified as Urgent Intervention, and more mentored students were classified as On Watch, suggesting a positive effect of the mentoring activities. Coincidentally, the fact that a higher percentage of non-mentored students began the school year classified as Urgent Intervention suggests that more students who would benefit from the mentoring activities could be recruited in the future.

Another comparative analysis demonstrated that mentored students improved their STAR assessment scores at the same rate as their non-mentored peers. The figure below illustrates the average scaled score for mentored and non-mentored students at each time point. As expected, the mentored students began the school year with lower scores than their non-mentored peers (recall that teachers selected students for the mentoring program based on their need). The parallel lines in the figure represent parallel growth from one point to another.

Mentored students showed the same rate of growth as their non-mentored peers



Conclusions

This evaluation report provided information about the process and impact of the Mentors in Toledo Schools program during the 2014-2015 school year. Mentoring activity was highest at McKinley Elementary, and across all schools in grades one and two. This is consistent with the original focus of the program. However, the program has expanded to other grades (Kindergarten and third) and schools since its inception in 2012. The program has maintained its high level of mentoring (compared to the results of the 2013 report) due largely to the existing data collection and communication system, and is poised to expand even further.

The reading achievement data that were available for this report provided marginal evidence regarding the effectiveness of the program. STAR Reading data showed that students moved toward their benchmark as the school year progressed, and a smaller percentage of mentored students ended the year in the “Urgent Intervention” category compared to the non-mentored students. In addition, the lack of difference in achievement growth between mentored and non-mentored students could be interpreted as a success considering the students in the mentoring program were selected due to their reading needs (and perhaps were more likely to maintain their initial levels or achievement, or worse, backslide).

The program appears to be implemented effectively, but there are ways in which it might be evaluated more effectively. First, better communication with the district is required to ensure that all of the relevant achievement and demographic data are provided. The data provided for this report were quite limiting, considering that almost 90% of the mentored students were not represented. Second, qualitative data—in the form of surveys or focus groups—should be collected from teachers, mentors, and students to better understand the nature of their participation, and further explore the impact of the program, both on students and on mentors. Qualitative data from teachers could help explain and supplement achievement patterns observed in the STAR data. These additional evaluation methods would make for a more comprehensive evaluation of the program, which is ever more important as the program continues to expand.