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Reading Mentors
Evaluation Report 2008-2009

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MEMconsultants
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Reading Mentors Program Evaluation 2008-2009
Executive Summary

Program and Evaluation Background

Team Read is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to deliver a proven replicable K-12 model to ensure reading success for struggling readers through the use of peer tutors. Since 1998, Team Read has served over 13,000 elementary and high school students, primarily through matching high school tutors with 2nd and 3rd graders. This year, Team Read piloted **Reading Mentors**, a program that brought 8th grade tutors from four middle schools to tutor 2nd and 3rd graders in nine elementary schools. The 8th graders worked side by side with the high school tutors. Forty-five 8th grade students participated as Mentors; however, tutor recruitment and retention was the primary challenge of this pilot and only thirteen mentors completed the second semester of the program.

Since this was the first year of the program, this evaluation focuses on documenting program qualities and impact, with an emphasis on identifying ways to strengthen the program in future years. Sources of data include evaluator and staff observation; participant interviews and focus groups; Site Coordinator surveys; tutor surveys; and reading assessment scores.

Mentor Impact on Reading Skills

Reading Mentors consistently created an environment that was likely to increase reading skills among tutees while engaging 8th graders in a meaningful learning experience of their own. Mentors provided high quality tutoring by working at the tutee's skill level, fostering "time on task," and using appropriate reading activities designed to foster specific reading skills. Reading assessment scores, Mentor reports, Site Coordinator reports and evaluator observations all provide evidence that tutee reading skills are developed by Reading Mentors, and that Reading Mentors frequently performed at the same level as high school aged tutors in the Core Program.

Unfortunately, the small sample size makes the interpretation of reading score impact data tentative; matched pre- and post-program reading scores were available for only eight of the tutees served by Mentors. Yet, these results are promising, as 86% of these tutees read "at or above standard" after Reading Mentors' participation.

Number of Tutees Reading "At or Above Standard"
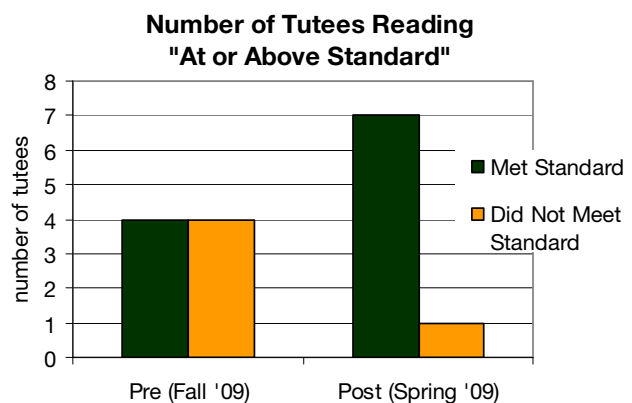
Impact on Leadership Skills

This evaluation suggests that the Mentor experience fosters leadership development. Tutors describe becoming involved because they wanted to make a difference and help others, especially younger kids. They report interpersonal skills

development in the form of increased patience and ability to work with challenging youth. Many Site Coordinators agree that the experience fostered leadership among the Mentors who remained engaged in the program.

Tutor-Tutee Relationships

Reading Mentors generally fostered a very positive tutor-tutee relationship. Tutors and tutees alike reported liking their partner and enjoying their work together. Although interpersonal challenges occurred when the tutee brought behavior or learning challenges, the Mentors received the support they needed to handle these situations.

Mentor Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention of Mentors was the biggest challenge for this program. Actual program participation numbers fall far short of program goals. It is important to note that Mentors might always be harder to recruit and retain than their counterparts in the Core Program, due to the realities of their age and the economic pressures some face. More years of evaluation will be necessary to reach firm conclusions about realistic recruitment and retention goals for this age group using a program model that does not offer income or college savings as an incentive. The following recommendations suggest ways to address recruitment and retention challenges.

Cohort Recruitment Model: Aim to recruit groups of middle school students to tutor at the same elementary school to increase the social aspects of the program. Consider a peer recruitment strategy that encourages potential and current tutors to invite their friends to be tutors, since teens are likely to have friends with similar skills and qualities. They are also more likely to stay involved in a program that includes their friends. Facilitate Mentor-only group activities during the school day to further strengthen the group bond and sense of belonging.

Tutor Interaction: The paired instruction model is ideal for maximizing instruction time for tutees, but limits the likelihood that tutors will interact and develop a connection with each other. Incorporate occasional activities that allow for small group work (two or three pairs) and are structured to encourage Mentors to interact with Coaches as well as other Mentors.

Student Engagement: The structured curriculum created a constant focus on reading, maximized "time on task," and provided a variety of skill-building activities that pairs could easily work through. Phasing in new activities as the weeks progress to minimize burnout or boredom could improve the tutoring

experience. These new activities may be more challenging, reflecting and fostering the increasing skills of both the reader and tutor.

Tutor Only Days and Group Activities: Occasional tutor-only days or fun, out of school activities, such as a library field trip, could provide a chance for advanced tutor training and group bonding. Consider scheduling some of these early in the year to allow new Mentors to experience them before they consider leaving the program.

Coaching or Mentoring of Mentors: Assign an experienced Coach to each Mentor to act as a buddy. This experienced Coach can be a friendly face who says "Hi" to the Mentor each day. This Coach could offer to listen to tutoring challenges and provide advice. Perhaps, as the schedule allows, this Coach could even observe the Mentor and provide the kind of tutoring feedback that Site Coordinators aren't always available to provide.

Conclusions

Reading Mentors is a promising program with the potential to impact the reading skills of 2nd and 3rd graders while advancing the competencies of 8th graders. While high school aged tutors involved in Team Read's Core Program have demonstrated positive results through their interaction with tutees, this evaluation suggests that 8th grade tutors have the potential to have a similar positive impact.

Recruitment and retention challenges must be overcome, however, before this potential can be realized. Future evaluation should assess the effectiveness of strategies designed to increase recruitment and retention success.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Team Read is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to deliver a proven replicable K-12 model to ensure reading success for struggling readers through the use of peer tutors. Since 1998, Team Read has served over 13,000 elementary and high school students, primarily through Reading Coaches, its core peer tutoring program; this program matches 2nd and 3rd graders with high school student tutors.

This year, Team Read piloted a new program, **Reading Mentors**. Reading Mentors adds a role for middle school tutors in Team Read's core program, tutoring 2nd and 3rd graders. Middle school students were recruited from four middle schools to tutor in nine elementary schools. Forty-five 8th grade students participated as mentors in 2008-09, and nineteen of those students completed one semester and started a second; however, only thirteen mentors completed the second semester, actively tutoring in four elementary schools.

Logic Model

RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	GOALS
PARTICIPANTS ▪ 8th grade students with at least a 2.0 GPA , excellent attendance, interest in tutoring younger students ▪ 2nd and 3rd graders reading significantly below standard on DRA RECRUITMENT ▪ Based on GPA, attendance, teacher recommendations SETTING/LOCATION ▪ Afterschool program at Seattle elementary schools cafeteria and/or libraries STAFF ▪ Teacher Supervisor for each site ▪ Team Read program staff PROGRAM ▪ Curriculums developed with Seattle School District	TRAINING ▪ 8th graders using HS curriculum developed by district literacy coaches TUTORING ▪ 8th graders tutor 2nd and 3rd graders afterschool in core program	TRAINING ▪ 60 8th reading tutors (15 tutors/school at 4 middle schools) ▪ 3 sessions ▪ 5 hours TUTORING ▪ 4 middle schools ▪ 60 8th reading tutors ▪ 60 2nd and 3rd grade tutees ▪ 3 hours of tutoring provided weekly (1.5 hours twice a week)	▪ Increased tutors' and tutees' reading skills ▪ Increased tutors' and tutees' reading confidence and motivation ▪ Enhanced Reading Mentors leadership development (i.e., sense of responsibility, patience, community services) ▪ Supported development of positive relationships between 2nd and 3rd graders with older students	Provide a continuum of literacy support for all students K-12

Evaluation Overview

Initial Research Questions

- What impact does Reading Mentors have on reading scores, reading confidence and reading motivation (compared to comparison group and core program outcomes) of tutees and tutors?

- Do tutee reading improvements differ between one-program vs. continuum program participants?

- Does tutor past program participation impact reading outcomes?

- What is the program impact related to leadership of tutors?

- What is the program impact on positive relationships between younger and older students?

- What does this data suggest regarding program improvement?

Methods

To assess how well Reading Mentors met program goals, students, Site Coordinators, Team Read staff, evaluator observations and reading scores all served as sources of data. The following tools were used to collect data. (Detailed information about sample sizes and response rates can be found in the Appendices).

1) *Evaluator Observations*. Five Reading Mentor sites were observed for at least a full session by an evaluator (Beacon Hill, Emerson, Hawthorne, Roxhill and Marshall), and sites with the most mentors were visited as many as four times. A structured observation tool was used to record notes regarding: reading skills, confidence and motivation; tutor-tutee relationships; program logistics and features; and program strengths and challenges.

2) *Interviews and Focus Groups of Active Tutors*. Almost every active tutor at each site was interviewed by the evaluators or participated in a focus group. Two focus groups were conducted at the beginning of the program at Beacon Hill and Emerson. A final focus group was conducted at Beacon Hill. Mentors and tutees at Hawthorne and Dunlap were interviewed at the end of the year.

3) *Site Coordinator Survey and Conversations.* Site Coordinators completed an online survey at the end of the program that addressed their overall experience, Reading Mentor development and effectiveness, tutor-tutee relationships, and curriculum, materials and support. When the evaluators were at sites for observations or student interviews, they also spoke with the Site Coordinators and recorded their observations.

4) *Focus Group with Dropped Out Tutors*. Students from Asa Mercer Middle School who did not fulfill their tutoring commitment participated in a focus group.

5) *Tutor Surveys (matched pre and post)*. Reading Leaders completed a pre-program and end of program survey with multiple choice and open ended questions that primarily assessed leadership skill development.

6) *Developmental Assets Profile (matched pre and post).* Reading Leaders completed a pre-program and end of program Developmental Assets Profile (DAP). The Search Institute has conducted and reviewed extensive research to identify 40 Developmental Assets, or building blocks of healthy development, that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible; the DAP is a survey that provides a way to document, quantify and portray an adolescent's reported types and levels of developmental assets working in his or her life.

7) *Team Read Staff Observations.* Team Read staff were in regular communication with the evaluators about the Reading Mentor sites, and the evaluators kept notes on their comments.
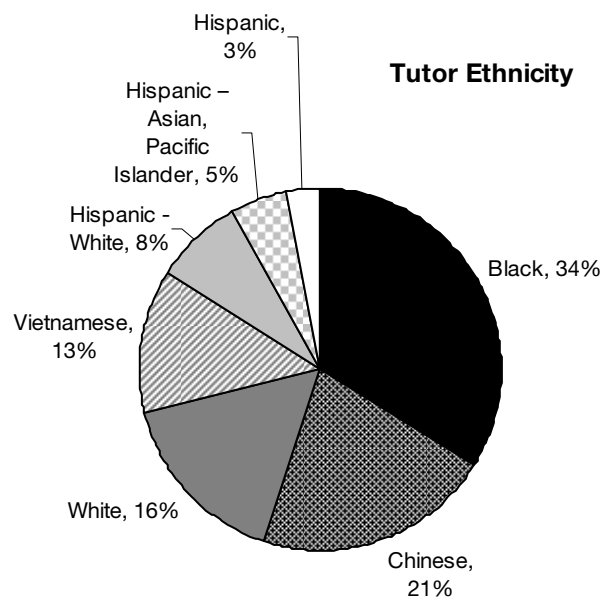
8) *Developmental Reading Assessment Scores.* The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is a reading assessment conducted by the Seattle Public Schools. Spring 2008 scores were used as "pre" scores, and Spring 2009 scores were used as "post" scores to assess changes in reading skills.

9) *School Contact Feedback.* Feedback from a school contact for each middle school student was sought, but no surveys were completed.

About the Mentors

Forty-five tutees participated for at least some of the program. The following demographic and other information was provided by Seattle Public Schools.

- Five percent of tutors qualify for bilingual services
- Five percent of tutors are homeless
- Most (89%) are female while 11% are male

Tutor Ethnicity

Hispanic, 3%
Hispanic – Asian, Pacific Islander, 5%
Hispanic - White, 8%
Vietnamese, 13%
White, 16%
Chinese, 21%
Black, 34%

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Reading Skills, Motivation and Confidence

DRA Scores

The Developmental Reading Assessment is an individual, performance-based assessment designed for use in primary grades. In individual assessment conferences, as students read the text aloud or silently, teachers analyze and assess student reading and comprehension. The teacher determines a student's DRA level by calculating the number of errors, the time each student took to complete the assessment, the student's phrasing and retelling.

For this evaluation, DRA scores were sought for all 2nd and 3rd grade tutees who were matched with an 8th grade Reading Mentor for the entire program. Fall 2009 scores were used as "pre" scores, and Spring 2009 scores were used as "post" scores to assess changes in reading skills. Pre and post scores were available for only eight of the thirteen students who met these criteria; a nineth student had a post score only. All but one of these tutees was in 2nd grade.

Number of Tutees Reading "At or Above Standard"

Average DRA Score
2nd Grade Tutees
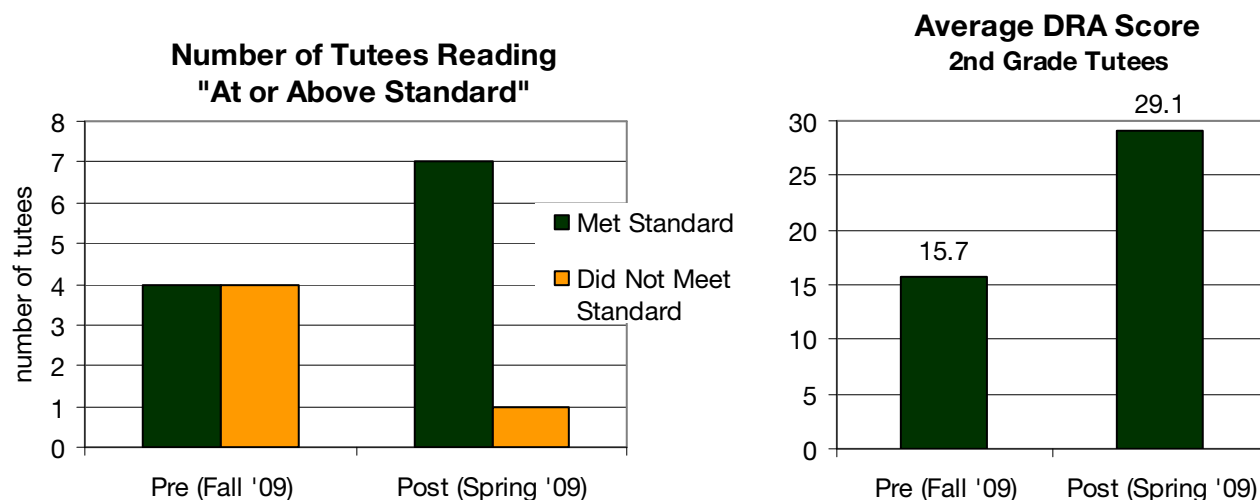
Although only 57% of these second graders met the DRA standard at the end of 1st grade, 100% met the standard at the end of 2nd grade after Reading Mentors participation. Even when the only 3rd grader, a student who participated for only one semester of the program and did not meet the standard in the spring, is included in the data, the overall rate of meeting the standard is 86%. These findings are promising, but the very small sample size greatly limits their conclusiveness.
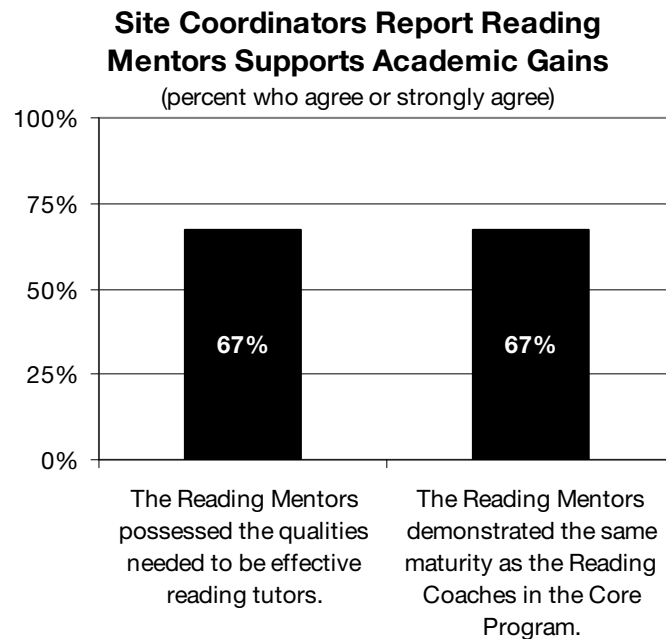
Further analysis that compares the mean DRA scores to those of Core Program tutees would be useful.

Mentors Report Student Reader Skills Improvement

In interviews and focus groups, mentors consistently report being surprised by how quickly the reading skills of their tutees can improve. All observed at least some improvement. They were most likely to report improvements in fluency, site word recognition and ability to sound out increasingly difficult words.

Site Coordinators have Mixed Reviews of Mentor Effectiveness

The Core Program has been evaluated for effectiveness for a number of years, and it is reasonable to assume that if Reading Mentors perform at a similar level as Coaches, their impact will be similar. Site Coordinators report that many Mentors perform as well as Coaches, and some do not.

Site Coordinators Report Reading Mentors Supports Academic Gains

(percent who agree or strongly agree)

100%	
75%	
50%	
25%	
0%	

67% — The Reading Mentors possessed the qualities needed to be effective reading tutors.

67% — The Reading Mentors demonstrated the same maturity as the Reading Coaches in the Core Program.

Selected Site Coordinator Comments

- *I really couldn't tell the difference between the mentors and coaches as far as commitment and focus were concerned.*

- *Each mentor was different - one stood out as an exceptional coach (better than many high schoolers), with perfect attendance, creative approaches to coaching, and a great work ethic. Others required a little more guidance but were dedicated throughout the program to becoming better coaches.*

- *I had two 8th grade students as coaches this year and found that though the situations were drastically different, both coaches lacked the maturity to be effective.*

- *Each mentor that came seemed to "know" what to do, as well as any of the other reading coaches, so I have to say they were well trained.*

- *Some of the Reading Mentors performed equally or better than some high school coaches. Other mentors seemed more immature. I would say that I really didn't notice a difference between the Reading Mentors and high school coaches. Both groups had the same positive and negative aspects. They just happened to be a different age than the high schoolers.*

Leadership Development

Reading Mentors Describe Leadership Practice

Mentors commonly describe patience as the skill most developed by this program. Mentors typically said they got involved because they wanted to make a difference and help others, especially younger kids. The following quotes come from Mentor surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Mentor Comments

Patience

- *I learned to be more patient and learned friendly ways to deal with situations.*
- *I learned how to be patient and how to control my temper.*
- *I learned how to be patient and how to control kids.*
- *I've learned that no matter how annoying your student may be you have to give your full focus and have a lot of patience and build a relationship.*
- *I learned to be more flexible.*
- *I have become more patient.*

Helping Younger Kids

- *I've learned that teaching can be incredibly difficult, but very rewarding.*
- *I wanted to help a student improve at reading and make a difference.*
- *Helping can be hard. Difficult.*
- *I really wanted to help kids learn how to read better.*
- *I choose to be a Reading Mentor so that I could help others.*
- *I chose to be a tutor because I wanted to help the others and pass down what [I] know to others.*
- *I feel that since I am older I need to help the younger children because I wouldn't want other people to not help my brothers or sisters. I want to make a difference in their vocabulary.*
- [I chose to be a Reading Mentor] *to help someone who needs help with reading and to see how students are at my little brother's age.*
- *It's so much fun to work with a younger student and help her.*
- *It makes me feel good to know I'm helping other people. I love kids and reading so this seemed like the perfect opportunity.*
- *I chose to be a Reading Mentor because I wanted to see if I would want to do something like teaching young students when I get older. Also, I chose to so that I could help a student to develop in something that they are dedicated to.*

Many Site Coordinators Agree Reading Mentors developed leadership skills (patience, responsibility, etc.) **among the 8th graders**

- strongly agree
- neutral
- agree

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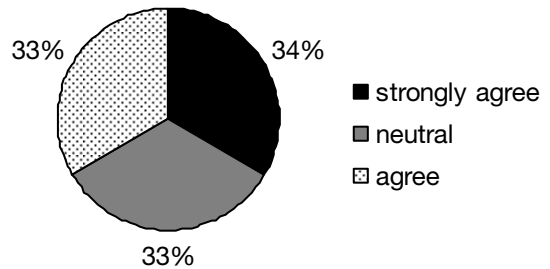
Mentor Surveys Raise Questions about Leadership Development

Pre-surveys were administered to 28 Mentors who were active a few weeks into the first semester of the program. Eleven of those students were still participating and completed a matched post-survey in the spring. This survey included the Developmental Assets Profile (described in the Evaluation Overview).

The survey was designed to assess the relationship between program participation and developmental assets generally and assess program impact on leadership skills specifically. The small number of matched surveys received makes all findings inconclusive, as they are not based on a sufficient sample to provide reliable data.

Surprisingly, mean responses to almost every question (those developed specifically for Reading Mentors, and those on the DAP) went *down* after participation in Team Read, not *up* as hypothesized. In most cases, the downward trend is so slight as to represent only one student's change in responses. Also, it should be noted that many "pre" scores were, on average, high (above the 50th percentile in national samples), making it unlikely that they would increase even with ideal programming. Future evaluation should determine if this survey response pattern is simply statistical "noise" or if it is reliable over years and merits interpretation.

Leadership Qualities *(questions developed for Reading Mentors)*	Mean Pre Rating	Mean Post Rating
	Scale: 1=strongly disagree 4=strongly agree	
I think it is important to help other people	4.0	3.8
I am patient when I need to be	3.4	3.3
I am serving others in the community	3.1	3.3
I would like to help solve social problems	3.6	3.3
I am good with young children	3.8	3.6
I am a Leader	3.0	3.2
I use my skills to help other people	3.6	3.7

DAP Scale Scores	Mean Pre Rating	Mean Post Rating	50%ile in national sample
	Possible Range: 0-30		
Support	23.2	23.0	19
Empowerment	24.4	23.3	20
Boundaries and Expectations	26.3	22.6	20
Constructive Use of Time	21.8	21.6	17
Commitment to Learning	27.1	26.5	19
Positive Values	26.6	25.5	19
Social Competence	27.3	25.9	20
Positive Identity	24.8	23.9	19

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Tutor – Tutee Relationships

Participants and Coordinators Describe Positive Relationships

Mentors discuss their attachment to their tutee as a motivating force behind their participation in Reading Mentors. Some said their tutee reminded them of themselves at that age. Others said that when they considered dropping out of the program, they didn't because they didn't want to break their commitment to their student reader. Tutees generally agreed that they liked their tutor a great deal.

Selected Comments

- *The students were professional and established relationships with their student readers. They did a WONDERFUL job supporting and encouraging their students. At each session they … came prepared and went above and beyond the call of duty!* ~ Site Coordinator

- *The children these two young women worked with adored them and they were able to keep them focused and on task.* ~ Site Coordinator

- *I experienced how important it is to get to know people because when you open up to them and make them know you're listening, it's a lot easier to teach them.* ~ Mentor

- *Out of being a Reading Mentor, I learned that a lot of the students have very different personalities. Some students are loud and outgoing, while others are quiet and nervous readers. When I was being assigned a new student, I switched through a lot of the students. All the students are very different and they seem to be at very different levels of reading.* ~ Mentor

Site Coordinators Report Supportive, Positive Relationships
(percent who agree or strongly agree)
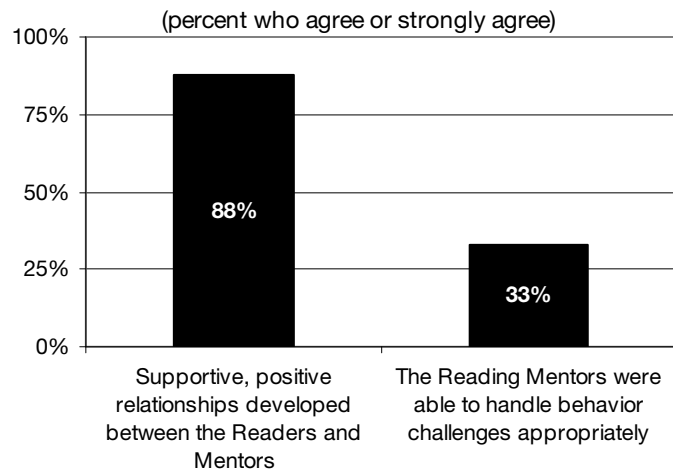
It should be noted that most Site Coordinators responded "neutral" in response to the statement "Reading Mentors were able to handle behavior challenges appropriately." (83% of Reading Leader Site Coordinators agreed with this statement, compared to 33% of Reading Mentor Site Coordinators). It is likely that Core Program Coordinators held Mentors to a higher standard than Reading Coordinators did to Leaders. This is of particular note since those Mentors who were still engaged at the end of the program reported they experienced few behavior challenges they could not handle.

Mentor Recruitment and Retention

The biggest challenge during this pilot was successful recruitment and retention of tutors. Although the goal was to involved 60 mentors, only 45 began the program; some of those dropped out, others were recruited, and 41 began the second semester. Unfortunately, only thirteen completed the second semester of the program. So, while those Reading Mentors who fully participated in the program appeared to be providing a quality experience for the 2nd and 3rd grade tutees, Reading Mentors seems to have failed to provide an engaging program for 8th graders.

Focus group conversations with Mentors who quit the program revealed that some left for reasons that are outside of Team Read's control, such as family obligations to care for siblings, and had very positive feelings about the program. However, some did have control over their choice. Thus, the following section of the report will emphasize program qualities and strategies that are likely to impact Mentor program participation. The program descriptions are derived from evaluator observation, Site Coordinator comments, Mentor interviews and Team Read Staff input.

PROGRAM QUALITIES

The Center for Youth Program Quality is a joint venture of the Forum for Youth Investment and High Scope Educational Research Foundation dedicated to applying lessons from research to improve youth experiences in after-school and other out-of-school environments.[1] Their work has synthesized research about out of school time programming to create one unified theory of what it takes to create a high quality youth program for teens that is likely to motivate them to attend, participate and contribute to an engaging learning environment.

This research identifies four "big ideas" or clusters of program qualities that are instrumental to that end: safety; support; interaction; and engagement. The following sections are organized by these ideas.

Safety

Young people engage in programs that afford psychological and emotionally safety, provide a physically safe environment, that provide healthy food and drinks as necessary, and provide the space and furniture necessary for the program to function.

Reading Mentors was consistently offered in a physically safe environment, because it is located in the school setting. Sites are free of health and safety hazards, sites are sanitary, and emergency procedures and first aid supplies are in place. The standardized provision of snack is also a program asset. The space and furniture was adequate, and at some sites ideal, for program delivery.

Reading Mentors sites also provided emotionally or psychologically safe environments. Session climate was typically respectful, relaxed and supportive; few negative behaviors were observed, and Site Coordinators described successful action to curtail or defuse such instances when they did arise.

There is an opportunity to consistently encourage teamwork and camaraderie among Reading Mentors and between Mentors and Coaches at all sites. Beacon Hill is the site where such emotional support among the Mentors was visible, since the group of Mentors was so large. At other sites, Mentors often worked alone with their tutee or sat near the only peer Mentor at their site. Better integration of Mentors with Coaches would have provided those Mentors a chance to walk into a more welcoming atmosphere each week.

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[1] For more information on this research, visit www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/qc (The Forum for Youth Investment's Quality Count Initiative) or review High/Scope Education Research Foundation: The Youth Program Quality Assessment downloaded on August 12, 2009 from http://etools.highscope.org/pdf/YouthPQA.pdf

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Support

Young people engage in programs that provide a welcoming atmosphere, opportunities for active engagement and skill building, and adults that encourage them and help them develop healthy relationships.

Sites almost always started and ended within ten minutes of the start time, and had necessary materials on hand. This supports all the students to meaningfully engage in the activities. Sessions did flow as planned. The entire program is premised on providing 8th graders the opportunity to demonstrate their reading skills and develop tutoring skills. These are program strengths.

To engage in Reading Mentors, 8th graders had to clear their after school schedules, minimize occasional conflicts and take extra transportation to a different school, in some cases many miles away. They then entered a site where Reading Coaches were likely to know each other already from their own schools, and in some cases from years of coaching together. It is easy to imagine an 8th grader feeling like an outsider in this setting. Extra efforts should be taken to create as welcoming and supportive an atmosphere as possible to encourage Mentor retention.

Each Site Coordinator was generally warm and respectful with Mentors. Some really excelled at this. Because some sites were large, it was not easy for a Site Coordinator to greet every student by name every day within the first 15 minutes of each session. Yet, even in smaller sites this wasn't always observed and is a useful, doable strategy for building a supportive atmosphere.

The daily tutoring activities are somewhat concrete in nature: following the daily schedule, memorizing site words, listening to young people decode difficult words, etc. This could be balanced with more abstract, higher-order thinking during occasional tutor-only conversations about their relative successes and challenges as tutors. Tutor-only days would provide a good opportunity to increase group bonding and foster reflection about what is it to be a successful tutor and teacher of reading.

There is the opportunity for tutors to receive more one-on-one feedback on their tutoring, so they can learn from their mistakes and be encouraged to a higher level of skill. Individualized acknowledgement happened at each site, and is something that should intentionally be used to help retain effective 8th grade tutors.

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Interaction

Interaction refers to the peer culture that exists within a program and what adults can do to positively affect that culture. Youth choose to participate in programs where they are supported by each other, and where they experience a sense of belonging. Youth prefer to participate in small groups as members and as leaders.

The Reading Mentors site with the most successful retention also had the strongest peer culture. A cohort of Washington Middle School students, most of whom were already friends or acquaintances prior to Reading Mentors, rode the bus together to Beacon Hill twice a week. Most sat together and choose to socialize together before their tutees arrived. They supported each other in challenges with tutees and enjoyed talking to each other about their experiences.

Emerson was the only other site with a meaningful sized cohort of Mentors (originally eight). However, this group quickly decreased in size, limiting the likelihood that a sense of group identity would be established. All other sites had two to four Mentors who did not necessarily know each other. This group size is not large enough to foster a sense of group belonging.

To increase retention, consider recruiting a cohort of at least six, ideally eight to twelve Mentors who come from the same middle school and tutor at the same elementary school. It also makes sense to intentionally recruit friends or students who have a positive prior relationship so that they look forward to traveling together and seeing each other at Reading Mentors.

Efforts can be taken at each site to create a sense of group identity among the Mentors themselves, and between Mentors and Coaches. For the most part, Mentors chose to sit by themselves and did not develop friendships with the Coaches. (Marshall was the one exceptional site in this regard: Mentors at this site reported they liked the opportunity to meet high school students and get to know them before going to the same high school.) Tutor-only days or activities that provide structured opportunities for them to get to know each other (introductions, team-building activities, personal updates, welcome of new group members, ice-breakers, etc.) would be useful. Also, occasional changes to the daily curriculum that encourage pairs to work in small groups with other pairs (and not necessarily the pair they typically choose to sit next to) would foster connections among tutors.

Core program Coaches have the added incentive of financial compensation, which likely maintains their attendance on days when they aren't as motivated to tutor. Over time, these Coaches develop a bond with other coaches who are also in their high school as well as with their individual tutee, and ultimately these all combine to solidify their commitment. The challenge with Reading Mentors is to maintain tutor participation for long enough that they then become bonded with their tutee and develop a sense of belonging to the Team Read family. Strategies that decrease the tendency to isolate tutors as individuals, but rather foster a sense of group belonging, would likely increase the retention rate of Reading Mentors.

Engagement

When young people feel safe and experience belonging, this clears the way for them to pursue learning. Engaging learning opportunities allow teens to plan, make choices, reflect and learn from their experiences.

Reading Mentors consistently provides teens opportunities to mentor and lead learning activities in each session they tutor. Within each session, they have responsibility and make choices (about which books to read, about how to best deliver feedback, etc.). Their role is terribly useful, the consequences of their choices are meaningful, and if they are successful they know they have made a difference in the world. These are strengths of the Reading Mentors program design.

Tutors might not always experience instant success, however. Maintaining Mentor involvement long enough for them to see the results of their efforts was a challenge this year. Two Site Coordinators suggested that incentives for the tutors might help *address this issue:*

- *Provide the Reading Mentors with more incentives for their diligence and dedication.*

- *Attendance was a challenge and occasionally they did seem to lack enthusiasm. How about some sort of acknowledgement, as simple as that of the "treasure chest" but at their level, done periodically.*

The intensive focus on reading tutoring and tutor-tutee work are program strengths, but create unintended program pitfalls as well because it limits the tutor experience. Time should be set aside for Mentors to reflect on what they are doing or what they have done, review their accomplishments, acknowledge their challenges, and deduce lessons on how to better tutor moving forward. This fully engages the Mentor and maximizes the quality of the learning experience.

The structured curriculum is a program strength. It created a constant focus on reading, maximized "time on task," and provided a variety of skill-building activities that pairs could easily work through. However, a few Mentors mentioned that the repetitive nature of the tutoring curriculum was a source of boredom at times.   The curriculum also could be strengthened by phasing in new activities as the weeks progress, to minimize burnout or boredom. These new activities may be more challenging, reflecting and fostering the increasing skills of both the reader and tutor, and maintaining the engagement of the tutor.

Logistics and Communication

Site Coordinator Support and Satisfaction
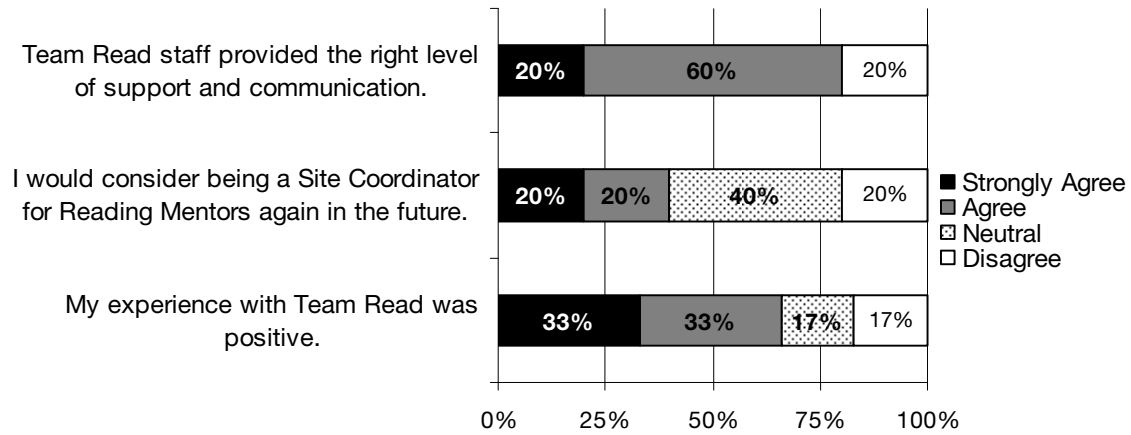
Selected Site Coordinator Comments

- *We received visits from Team Read throughout the year.*

- *Truthfully, no (TR staff did not provide the right level of support and communication). I expressed concern before placement that because our school is a K-8, there was a possibility for crossover issues. I was assured that it wouldn't be an issue and reading mentors were placed at our school anyway.*

- *Not having an official roster @ the beginning of the program was a minor challenge.*

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Academic Development:* Reading Mentors consistently provided an environment likely to increase reading skills among tutees and engage 8th graders in a meaningful learning experience that enhances their own academic development. Mentors were observed providing high quality tutoring by working at the tutee's skill level, fostering time on task, and consistently working on appropriate reading activities designed to foster specific reading skills. DRA scores, Mentor report, Site Coordinator report and evaluator observation all provide evidence that tutee reading skills are developed by Reading Mentors participation.

- *Tutor-Tutee Relationships:* Reading Mentors generally fostered a very positive tutor-tutee relationship. Tutors and tutees alike reported liking their partner and enjoying their work together. In many cases, the Mentor developed a strong bond with their tutee and reported a personal loyalty that was stronger than any desires to quit. Although interpersonal challenges occurred when the tutee brought behavior or learning challenges, the Mentors report that they received the support they needed to handle these situations.

- *Leadership Development:* Site Coordinators and Mentors provided some evidence that leadership development occurred among Mentors. Many Site Coordinators agree that the experience fostered leadership among Mentors, but only when the Mentors remained engaged in the program. Mentors report interpersonal skills development in the form of increased patience and ability to work with challenging youth. Mentors also report enjoying the chance to help younger children. However, surveys intended to assess a broad range of leadership and personal development did not detect any changes correlated with program participation. Team Read staff should further clarify its goals around leadership development and continue evaluation of this goal.

- *Tutor Skill Development:* Tutors learned what it takes to be an effective tutor, and developed this competency area through program participation. The development of this competency could be enhanced with more one-on-one feedback during the coaching sessions, and with tutor-only days designed to foster reflection and provide advanced tutor training that is grounded in tutor experience.

- *Past Participation:* This study did not provide strong evidence for assessing the impact of past Team Read participation on tutoring ability. If this is an important evaluation question, future evaluations should be structured to better understand this by randomly assigning tutees to experienced and inexperienced tutors, and tracking the reading score outcomes.

- *Tutor Recruitment and Retention:* Successful recruitment and retention of Mentors was the biggest challenge for this program. Tutees who had the opportunity to work with a Mentor throughout the program greatly benefited. Too few had this opportunity, and actual program participation numbers fall far short of program goals. The most important step toward strengthening this program is improved recruitment, selection and retention of Mentors. However, it is important to note

> Some have claimed that peer tutoring is successful because it is one-on-one, but this is hardly convincing. .. As argued elsewhere, one-to-one teaching only increases the probability that effective teaching can occur, it does not ensure it. Individualized instruction can increase the amount of appropriate feedback, focus teacher/tutor attention on matching curricular demands with the tutee's prior knowledge, and increase time on task. Individualized instruction can also facilitate the introduction of appropriately challenging tasks and provide excellent follow-up and consolidation of learning.
> ~ John Hattie, Studies in Educational Evaluation

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that there is evidence that Mentors might always be harder to recruit and retain, due to the realities of their age. And, if recruitment continues at schools with economically diverse populations, some Mentors will continue to bring family pressures to take part time job or to stay home with younger siblings rather than complete their Team Read commitment. A few more years of evaluation will be necessary to reach firm conclusions about realistic recruitment and retention goals for this age group, and for a model that does not offer income or college savings as an incentive. The following recommendations could help to increase Mentor recruitment and retention:

- *Cohort Recruitment Model:* Aim to recruit cohorts of middle school students to tutor at the same school, rather than individuals. Groups of students meeting afterschool to ride a bus together to Team Read increases the social aspects of the program, which are important at this age. Consider a peer recruitment strategy that encourages potential and current tutors to invite their friends to be tutors as well, since teens are likely to have friends with similar skills and qualities and likely to stay involved in a program that includes their friends. Then, Mentor-only group activities for the cohort can occur during the school day, further strengthening the group bond and sense of belonging without taking away from the limited afterschool time.

- *Curriculum and Tutor Interaction:* The paired instruction model is ideal for maximizing instruction time for tutees, but limits the likelihood that tutors will interact and develop a connection among each other. If a Mentor immediately has a strong bond with their tutee, this might be enough to maintain their participation. However, it would be wise to incorporate occasional activities that allow for small group work (two or three pairs) and are structured to encourage Mentors to interact with Coaches as well as other Mentors.

- *Curriculum and Student Engagement:* The structured curriculum is a program strength. It created a constant focus on reading, maximized "time on task," and provided a variety of skill-building activities that pairs could easily work through. The curriculum could be enhanced by phasing in new activities as the weeks progress to minimize burnout or boredom. These new activities may be more challenging, reflecting and fostering the increasing skills of both the reader and tutor.

> As has been found in many studies, the effect size of tutoring is negatively related to duration… This is probably due to "routi-nization" and/or burnout in longer programs, which could lead to lower enthusiasm on the part of tutors and tutees. Burnout may make the tutors less sensitive to their tutees' responses and more concerned with getting through the routine.
> ~ John Hattie, <u>Studies in Educational Evaluation</u>

- *Tutor Only Days and Group Activities:* Occasional tutor-only days or fun, out of school activities (such as the event at the library) could provide a chance for advanced tutor training and group bonding. Mentors enjoyed the few such events that happened this year, and suggested more. Consider scheduling some of these early in the year to allow new Mentors to experience them before they consider leaving the program.

- *Coaching or Mentoring of Mentors:* Consider assigning an experienced Coach to each Mentor to act as a combination ambassador/friend/mentor/coach. This experienced Coach can be a friendly face who says "Hi" to the Mentor each day. This Coach could offer to listen to tutoring challenges and provide advice. Perhaps, as the schedule allows, this Coach could even observe the Mentor and provide the kind of tutoring feedback that Site Coordinators aren't always available to provide.

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	Beacon Hill	Brighton	Concord	Dunlap	Emerson	Hawthorne	Madrona	Roxhill	T Marshall
Observation Schedule	- Formally observed twice - Visited two additional times	Never visited as students dropped out early in program	Never visited as students dropped out early in program	Never visited as students dropped out early in program	- Formally observed twice - Visited one additional times	- Formally observed once - Visited one other time	Never visited as students dropped out early in program	- Formally observed once - Visited one other time	- Formally observed once
Middle School	Washington	Mercer	Washington	Mercer	Mercer	Mercer	Washington	Denny	Washington
Recruitment & Retention (start/finish)	- WaMS-BH connection helped - (9/9, not all the same 9)	- (4/0)	- (1/0)	- (2/0)	- (8/1)	- (2/2)	- (2/0)	- Walking distance from MS helped - (3/4)	- (2/3)
Group Qualities	- Large group of high achievers - Bonded group				- High drop out creates questions about Mentor selection; focus group suggests demanding home lives, varied maturity	- Future-thinking mentors mentioned college applications		-	- Students seemed mature and committed
Interaction w/Coaches	- Mostly self-segregated from coaches with 1-2 exceptions				- Unclear given small number of Mentors	- Little interaction with coaches		-	- Mentors integrated w/coaches
Site Culture	- Site runs very smoothly without coordinator intervention				- Newer Coordinator was not extremely engaged	- Coordinator provide individualized praise to Mentors, but otherwise hands-off		- Typical site, seemed to work fine	- Consistent program that ran smoothly
Reading Scores	- Only site with meaningful number of pre-post DRAs: very promising reading impact								

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