



# Mentorship

Studies show that Oklahoma currently faces a large work skills gap. In 2016, approximately half (46 percent) of the Oklahoma workforce had either attained only a high school diploma or dropped out of high school altogether. However, by 2025, 77 percent of Oklahoma jobs will require some form of education beyond high school. This is why it is important more than ever to provide students with high-quality work-based experiences. (Oklahoma works)

WBL takes many forms and often includes experiences such as: internships, job shadowing, and service-learning. “High-quality work-based learning experiences pair young people with mentors who show them how to solve real-world problems, cultivate professional skills, shoulder adult responsibilities, build workplace relationships, identify interests and aptitudes, and make good decisions about careers and college.” (The Southern Regional Education Board)

## WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Mentorship is a protected relationship in which a more knowledgeable or experienced person guides and nurtures the development or growth of another. Currently, there are 9 million kids in our country growing up without a mentor. That means that 1 out of every 3 young people do not have the support of a positive caring adult outside of their family. (<https://bbbsok.org/>) Any safe and caring adult can be a mentor, whether you are a classroom educator or a community professional everyone has a place in supporting a student’s development. There are two type of mentorship programs:

- A community mentorship program invites outside professionals or community leaders to help a student connect with professionals to learn business etiquette, career pathways, and other networking opportunities. This may include job shadow activities, one-on-one coaching, or other work-based learning activities. This is optimal for secondary students as this may involve time beyond the school day.
- A school-wide mentorship program allows students to build relationships with educators or school staff in order to increase student engagement as well as other student success outcomes. This is optimal for elementary students in school or after-school programs.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Even when students' lives are challenging, schools can serve as one of the most important stabilizing factors. Fostering a relationship with students increases attendance and academic achievement while lowering the chance of violent incidents. Students who perceive their teachers and school administrators as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear and fair are more likely to be willing to reach out to adults.
- Building productive and supportive relationships with trusted adults is known to be a significant deterrent for mental and physical abuse. Even when abuse does occur, it ends more quickly if the child has a trusted adult. Fostering positive relations with students involves teachers, counselors, principals, secretaries, librarians, cafeteria staff, janitorial staff, coaches, volunteers, etc.
- The fast pace of the school day may allow students to slip through the cracks, compounding negative student perceptions of their status in the school. When students feel disconnected, they believe they do not have peers or adults to turn to when they are confronted with dangerous situations or ideas about self-harm. Even the simple act of checking in on a student when they appear sad, unusually quiet, or after returning from an absence can help students know they matter.

(OSDE CHampions Brief #2)

## LEVERAGING INDIVIDUAL CAREER ACADEMIC PLANNING (ICAP) TO CREATE A SCHOOL-WIDE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

In the Fall of 2020, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Hope Research Center of the University of Oklahoma engaged in a partnership to investigate the effect to which ICAP participation is associated with student hope. Correlational analyses showed significant associations between hope, teacher-student relationships, future aspirations and goals, well-being and items associated with the ICAP experience (student options, goals, and plans after high school). Further analyses demonstrated that teacher-student relationships, ICAP, and future aspirations and goals are significantly associated with hope. Other discoveries include:

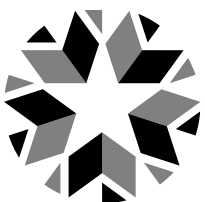
- Increases in hope are associated with increases in well-being, future aspirations and goals, items associated with the ICAP experience (student options, goals, and plans after high school), and teacher-student relationships.
  - Teacher-student relationships, the strongest association, is followed by the student ICAP experience variable.
- (Nurturing the Hope and Well Being of Oklahoma Students. The Role of the Individual Career Academic Planning)

## RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- School leaders can help to make expectations for all adult staff explicit through professional development, staff meetings, and outreach efforts through parent/teacher organizations. See the Trusted Adult Campaign (<http://bit.ly/champ2-1>) for more ideas.
- Selecting safe adults is crucial to ensuring the safety of all students. Districts should develop safety policies and procedures. For tips on creating mentorship policies, procedures view this mentorship [toolkit](#).
- Provide training that communicates clear objectives for the mentors. Keep in mind that adults who are acting as informal mentors and trusted adults should be thoughtful about how judgmental responses might disengage the student. Practicing responses that are inquiry-oriented can ensure that the conversation remains open.

(OSDE Champions Brief #2)

- Districts interested in including community mentors should consider sending business partnership [letters](#) and [agreements](#) to their local businesses or chambers of commerce.
- K-12 school districts can initiate or continue relationships with their local tribal nations by contacting appropriate tribal leaders. This [helpful guide](#) shows appropriate leaders to contact at each Oklahoma Tribal Educational Agency.
- Consider [increasing access](#) to effective college and career advisors or counselors.
- Consider leveraging your [Oklahoma 21st Century Community Learning Center](#) as a space to build quality mentorship programs.



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