Seedling's Promise: A Mentoring Program for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2013-2014

Children with Incarcerated Parents

An estimated 2.7 million children under the age of 18 have a parent in a state or federal prison across the United States (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, & Wheeler; 2013). Incarceration affects a disproportionate number of children from racial minority backgrounds. One in 9 African American children (11.4percent), 1 in 28 Hispanic children (3.5percent) and 1 in 57 white children (1.8 percent) has an incarcerated parent.

Parental arrests and incarceration also may include those who are unauthorized immigrants (Chaudry et.al, 2010). There were an estimated 5.5 million children in the United States who had unauthorized parents. Almost three-quarters of these children were U.S.-born citizens. In 2010, it was estimated more than 100,000 immigrant parents of U.S. citizen children have been deported from the United States in the last 10 years.

In addition to the arrest and incarceration of the parent, researchers have identified other co-occurring circumstances that can contribute to additional stress or problems for the children. These factors include single parenting, poverty, level of education, parent substance use, and parent mental health problems (Maruschak et al., 2010; Chaudry et.al, 2010). Children with incarcerated parents may likely be placed in foster care or have new partners or family members added to the household, causing additional disruption for the children.

Parental incarceration affects children emotionally, developmentally, and socially. They are at increased risk for socio-emotional problems that may be evidenced by depression, anxiety, withdrawal, aggressive behaviors, and substance use. Children of incarcerated parents also may have trouble with peer relationships, cognitive delays, and difficulties in school that include poor attendance and low academic performance (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010; Chaudry et.al, 2010; Parke, 2001). Incarceration of a parent can threaten a child's attachment security because of parent-child separation, confusing messages about the incarceration, restricted contact with the parent, and unstable care-giving arrangements (Murray and Murray, 2010).

Haskins (2014) asserts incarceration of the father also may affect children's school readiness and cognitive outcomes in elementary school. The children's emotional and social challenges may have short-term implications for early cognitive skills development and long-term ramifications for future academic

attainment, as critical decisions are made in the first few years of schooling regarding placement in ability groups and special education. These placements, coupled with emotional and/or behavioral issues, may set the children on a pathway of cumulative disadvantage. Evidence suggests this scenario is strongest for boys and disproportionately experienced by black children, based on the fact that black parents are disproportionately more likely to be incarcerated. It may be a factor in explaining the transmission of disadvantage from father to son and ongoing racial and gender differences in early schooling outcomes.

Support for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Chaudry et al. (2010) proposed the school environment can help many of the children struggling with adjustments after their parents' arrests and or incarceration. In their study, students benefited from school routines and the support they received from teachers and school personnel. In several cases students who had struggled at first recovered their academic performance or saw improvements in the long term.

Mentoring programs are considered an important support structure for children with incarcerated parents. In a study where more than one-third of the mentored youth had a close family member who was incarcerated or often in trouble with the law, Herrera, DuBois, and Grossman (2013) found that higher-risk students in mentoring relationships improved their emotional or psychological well-being, peer relationships, academic attitudes, and self-reported grades. In another meta-analysis of 73 mentoring program evaluations (Dubois et al, 2011), mentoring was found to influence the social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development of children.

Over the past 20 years, school-based mentoring has been the fastest growing mentoring approach and accounts for nearly half of all youth-mentoring programs (Schwartz, Rhodes, & Chan, 2011; DuBois & Karcher, 2005), and it has been associated with positive academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional outcomes. Most documented benefits of school-based mentoring are related to behaviors and attitudes that contribute to school success (e.g., school attendance, academic self-confidence, school connectedness) rather than academic performance (Wheeler, Keller, and Dubois, 2010). Some studies have found school-based mentoring programs may be more successful at the elementary level, because the school environment is not as administratively complex as it might be in a middle or high school (Schwarts, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2012).

The benefits for youth participating in mentoring relationships are strongly related to the degree of closeness that is formed between mentors and mentees (Dubois and Karcher, 2013) This closeness is marked by feelings of connectedness, appropriate sharing, and mutual feelings of care. Mentoring relationships where mentors and mentees report greater degrees of closeness are more likely to last longer and lead to better developmental outcomes for the mentees.

Purpose of This Report

Annually, the Seedling Foundation commissions an evaluation of Seedling's Promise, a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify program areas of strength and challenge. This information will be used to adjust program activities to ensure they are as effective as they can be. The evaluation also will highlight areas of success and progress to communicate the program's impact to others.

Seedling's Promise

Seedling's Promise is a school-based mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents. The purpose of the program is two-fold:

- To provide the children with a long-term, positive relationship with a trained adult mentor, so they may be better able to navigate the challenges experienced during this period of family separation; and

- To help the children develop or maintain positive attitudes towards and connections to school, so they may have a clear understanding of the critical need for education to achieve their long-term goals.

In 2013-2014, Seedling's Promise operated on funds provided by multiple sources. Austin Independent School District's Department of School, Family & Community Education provided over $393,000 to support the program in the district. This contribution included local school district and grant dollars. In Del Valle ISD, Seedling program services were provided through a grant from Travis County Health and Human Services. Additionally, individual donations and other grants for the program totaled more than $200,000.

Seedling's Promise program implementation closely follows what is recommended in current mentoring research literature and carefully considers the needs of the children served by the program. The researched-based program components recommended in the *Elements of Effective Practices for Mentoring, Third Edition (2009)* include mentor screening, orientation, and training; customized mentor-mentee matching; well defined parameters for mentoring sessions; ongoing support, supervision, and monitoring of mentoring relationships; recognition of participant contributions; and closure of ending relationships.

The program is characterized by a collaborative service approach where individualized mentoring experiences are provided for the mentees. As a part of this process, the core team of Seedling Mentor Directors, School Contacts, and mentors collaboratively support each mentee.

While the primary expectations of the program articulate that the children will have long-term, positive relationships with their mentors and will develop or maintain positive attitudes towards school, research has shown that there may be a ripple effect in mentoring outcomes. Children also may have improved or comparable attendance, discipline, and academic outcomes when compared to themselves prior to participating in the program or compared to their peers. The following graphic displays Seedling's Promise theory of change.

Figure 1. Seedling's Promise Theory of Change
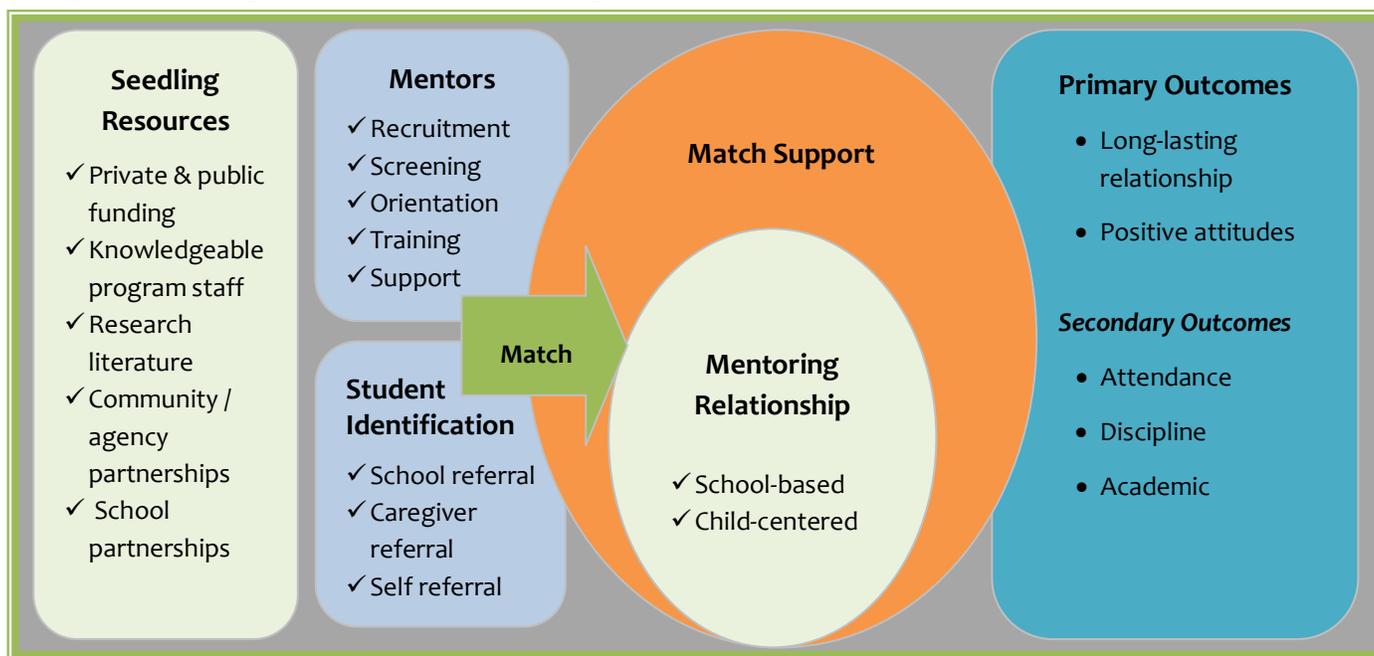
Measuring Program Outcomes

A variety of quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed for this evaluation. Data included demographic data; state assessment data; attendance data; discipline data; student, teacher, and mentor survey responses. Mentees enrolled in Austin ISD (n=454) and Del Valle ISD (n= 51), eligible students who were on the program waitlist (n=110), and a matched comparison group (n=448) who were enrolled in Austin ISD during the 2013-2014 school year were examined in this report. All of the students were actively enrolled in the spring of 2014 and had confirmed enrollment, attendance, discipline, and assessment records in district data systems. Comparison students were selected based on shared demographic characteristics and schools of enrollment.

Baseline student-level data for mentees enrolled in Del Valle ISD in 2013-2014 were obtained for evaluation and grant compliance reporting needs. An accurate comparison group for 2013-2014 Del Valle students could not be confirmed. To avoid bias by including Del Valle ISD student data without appropriately matched students, the outcomes for attendance, discipline, and testing for mentees in Del Valle will be reported separately throughout the report. Plans for selecting an accurate comparison group for Del Valle are underway for 2014-2015.

A variety of data analyses were used in this evaluation. Descriptive statistics (e.g., numbers and percentages) were used to summarize academic and survey outcomes for each group. Inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests and z-tests) were used to determine statistical significance of the results, that is, to find out whether observed differences between the outcomes of interest for the student groups were greater or lesser than would be expected only by chance. Multi-level modeling also was employed to explore the relationships among variables. Multilevel models are particularly appropriate for research designs where data are nested within hierarchical structures (i.e., student program participants attending different schools). Finally, contextual analyses were used to summarize themes that emerged from open-ended survey questions. Additional technical documentation is provided in Appendix 1.

Seedling Participants

In 2013-2014, the program was officially provided in 41 designated schools (Table 1) in Austin and Del Valle ISDs. Children attending 51 "satellite" schools were supported by the program, as mentors continued the mentoring relationship after a child had moved into a school that did not have a designated contact at the campus. Mentors and mentees at satellite schools located in Austin, Bastrop, Hays, Manor, Pflugerville, and Round Rock ISDs, along with four charter schools, were provided with program services through the Seedling Mentor Directors. Analyses of student outcomes revealed similar outcomes for mentees, regardless of whether or not they attended a Seedling-supported or satellite school.

Seedling participants were in grades Pre-K through 12th grade (Figure 3). Almost all of them were low-income (99%) and minority (Figure 2). Twenty-eight percent of the students were English language learners, and 18% had special education needs. Due to the incarceration of their parent(s), they may not have been consistently enrolled in a single school.

Seedling Matches

The number of Seedling mentors increased 16.5% in 2013-2014. With a 70% mentor return rate, Seedling supported 550 mentors who mentored one or more children during the school year (Figure 4). Sixty-three percent of the mentors mentored more than one year, with an average of three years. The average commitment of Seedling mentors was above the national average of 14 months (Mentoring.org, 2013).

Figure 4. The number of Seedling mentors increased.
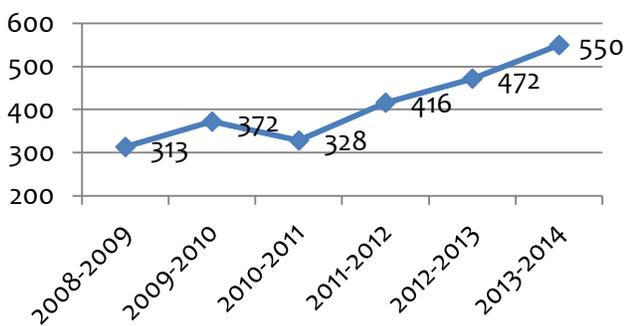
Table 1. The number of children and schools participating in Seedling's Promise continues to increase.

School Year	# of Program Schools	# of Participants	% Increase
2006-2007	15	115	
2007-2008	21	178	54.8%
2008-2009	28	320	79.8%
2009-2010	26	408	27.5%
2010-2011	28	369	-9.5%
2011-2012	34	440	19.2%
2012-2013	36	501	13.9%
2013-2014	41	565	12.8%

Source: Seedling's Promise program enrollment records, 2006-2013.

Figure 2. Most children served by Seedling's Promise are Hispanic or African American.

Figure 3. Seventy-three percent of the children served by Seedling's Promise were in elementary school.

Source. Seedling program records, 2013-2014.
Source. Austin ISD student enrollment records, 2013-2014.

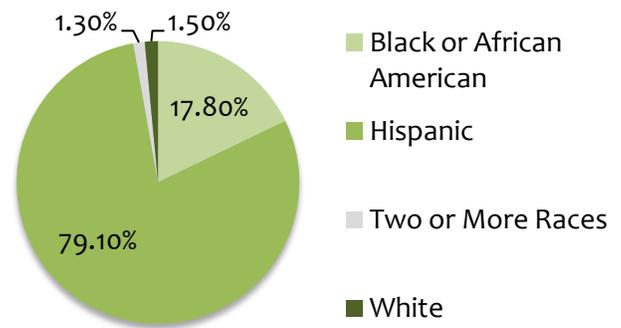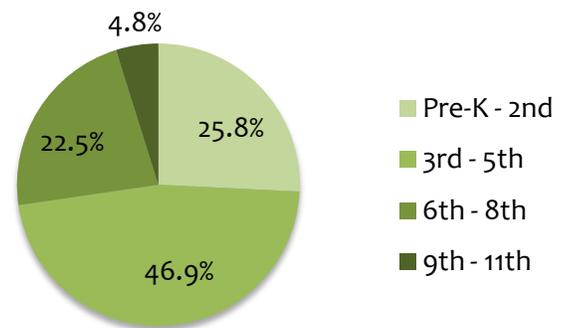For mentoring matches existing in the 2013-2014 school year, the average length of Seedling mentoring relationships was 18 months, some lasting up to 7 to 8 years (Figure 5a). More than half of the mentees had participated in the program for more than one school year. A significantly greater percentage of mentees participating for 24 or more months were in middle or high school (55%), compared with the proportions of middle and high school level students participating for less than 3 months, between 3 and 12 months, and 12 to 24 months (Figure 5b). Mentees participating for more than 24 months had an average participation length of 3 years and 9 months.

While the research-base on school-based mentoring relationships lasting across multiple years is lacking, several studies of school-based mentoring did examine match-length within a single school year. In their study of school-based mentoring, Schwartz, Rhodes, and Herrera (2012) estimated youth received an average of 4.7 months of mentoring within a single school year. This finding was consistent with findings published by Herrera, Grossman, Kaugh, Feldman, McMaken, and Jucovy (2007) where the average match length within a single school year was estimated to be 4.6 months. The average match length for first-time Seedling mentees within the 2013-2014 school year was 5.3 months. Schwartz et al. (2012) also found 48% of new mentoring matches terminated during the first year, whereas 10% of the newly matched Seedling mentees had relationships that ended within the school year. In many cases, the Seedling mentees had transferred to a new school.

Figure 5a. Over half of the Seedling mentees were participating in the program for more than one year in 2013-2014.
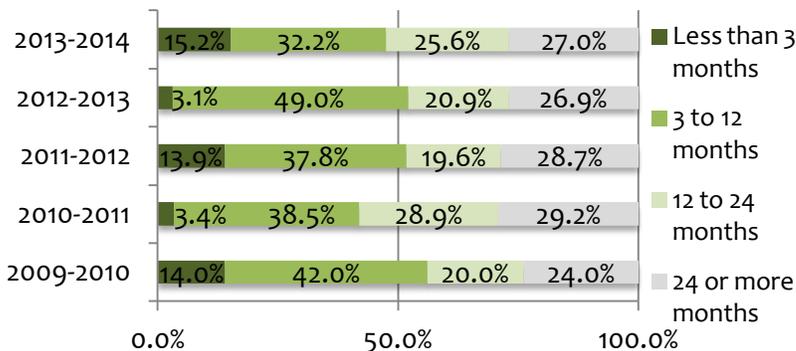
Figure 5b. A significantly greater percentage of mentees participating for 24 or more months were in middle or high school, compared with mentees participating for shorter durations.
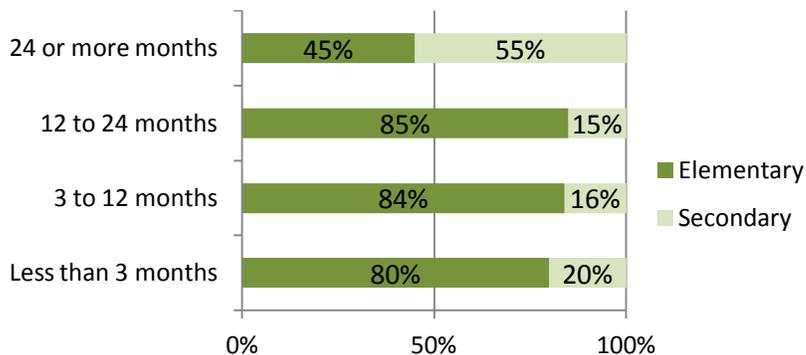
Source. Seedling program records, 2013-2014.

Research says..

Match length is a considerable indicator for program effectiveness. Researchers have reported greater mentoring outcomes for mentees who had enduring mentoring relationships. Caring and supportive mentors can challenge negative views that the children may hold of themselves. Enduring mentoring relationships have been linked to significant improvements in children's perceptions of their relationships with peers, family members, and other adults. (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, and Rhodes; 2011). Mentor attendance also was a positive predictor for improved mentee social skills, self-esteem, and self-management (Karcher, 2005).

Seedling Match Support

What were the perceptions of the School Contacts?

As a part of the collaborative support provided to mentors and their mentees, School Contacts assisted Seedling Mentor Directors in supporting and monitoring the mentoring relationships. The annual Seedling mentor survey collected information from School Contacts to provide evidence of effective mentoring program practices and quality of the mentoring relationships.

Consistent with survey results from prior school years, School Contacts were highly supportive and complimentary of the program (Appendix 6). All School Contacts received timely support from their assigned Seedling Mentor Directors who were also rated as *extremely knowledgeable* or *knowledgeable* about the policies and procedures of the mentoring program. Almost 94% of the School Contacts experienced a sense of partnership with their Mentor Directors, *always* or *frequently*, during the school year.

School Contacts were asked about effective strategies to identify and recruit children for participation. They reported that teachers, parents, and the students themselves most frequently identified eligible program participants. Counselors and school registrars also identified children eligible for program mentoring. School contacts stressed the importance of personalized and sensitive communication with caregivers and children.

The program challenges School Contacts encountered were consistent with what they reported in prior school years. The most prevalent challenges described across school sites were obtaining permission to participate in the program and having enough mentors to be paired with newly identified program participants. Several School Contacts described the worry families had disclosing this sensitive information, while others reported that families were very appreciative of the support and willing to participate.

School Contacts described how they were tracking or monitoring the progression of the mentoring relationships. Almost all of the School Contacts reported they regularly communicate with the students and their mentors. Many School Contacts stated the students and/or the mentors initiated these conversations, indicating the relationships were important to both. Some School Contacts felt they could not accurately assess the actual progress of relationships, as their responsibilities did not afford them with the time to consistently interact with the mentoring matches.

> ### Research says..
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> Herrera et al. (2007) found mentors who reported higher levels of staff support and reported receiving more training felt closer to their mentees and were more likely to carry their match over into a subsequent school year than those mentors who received less support. Karcher (2005) similarly found that mentors who reported more contact with school staff felt more important and viewed their relationships more positively than mentors who had little staff contact.

School Contacts were asked how Seedling staff could improve program services. They overwhelmingly requested more mentors, especially those that were male or Spanish-speaking. School Contacts also suggested campus-specific sharing sessions to provide mentors with a support network at the school.

What were the perceptions of the mentors?

Mentors responded to survey questions regarding effective mentoring program practices and satisfaction with their support (Appendix 4). Again this year, Seedling mentor survey responses were highly positive and consistent with survey results from previous years and highlights are described in this section of the report (Looby; 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013).

Mentors indicated they received valuable support from Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts. Almost 93% of new and returning mentors in 2013-2014 reported Seedling Mentor Directors to be *extremely helpful or mostly helpful*. About 60% of mentors requested assistance from School Contacts, and 81% reported them as being *extremely* or *mostly helpful*. Open-ended comments described Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts as helpful, responsive, efficient, attentive, and open to inquiries. Mentors recognized that School Contacts were busy with other school duties but were very supportive of the mentoring relationships. Seventy percent of mentors also reported the school campuses to be *extremely friendly* to mentors.

> **2013-2014 Mentor Training**
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> Mentors were provided with ongoing training that included new mentor orientation, monthly newsletters, and mentor support luncheons. Monthly training sessions included the following topics:
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> - Transition to High School
> - Bullying Prevention
> - Connecting with Your Mentee at Their Developmental Level
> - Understanding Trauma
> - What Would You Do?
> - Children of Prisoners' Rights, Their Feelings, and How Mentors Can Help
> - Cultural Responsiveness
> - Transition to Middle School
> - Mentor Support and Inspired Activities

Mentor training and support was provided throughout the year for all mentors. About 39% of all mentors reported attending one or more monthly training sessions and almost all of them reported the sessions to be *extremely* or *mostly helpful*. Of those who did not attend, 52% reported they could not get away from work more than one day a week; 24% could not attend sessions during the lunch hour; 27% preferred training in the electronic newsletter, and 17% preferred online training. Mentors had mixed responses when asked to identify factors that would increase their training participation, and they suggested alternate training times, places, and topics.

Mentoring Relationship Outcomes

What did the mentors report about their relationships?

Most mentors met with their mentees frequently throughout the school year (Appendix 4). Eighty-nine percent of mentors reported meeting with their mentee each week, as expected. Of the 11% who reported seeing their mentee less than once a week, 42% saw their mentee three times a month and 49% saw their mentee twice a month. Less than 5 mentors reported seeing their mentee less than once a month. When mentors were asked to explain reasons for not seeing their mentee weekly, work obligations and student absenteeism were most often cited.

> **Research says..**
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> Meeting frequency is an objective indicator associated with match quality (Dubois and Karcher, 2013). When mentors met with their mentees at least twice a month, the match quality had a chance to solidify. Matches enduring for a year or more generally yielded greater levels of trust and closeness.

Mentors reported a variety of activities they engaged in with their mentees. Most often, they spent their time talking and listening. Significantly more mentors reported playing games and engaging in arts and crafts activities, than did mentors in the prior school year (Table 2). They reported playing games created a relaxed and fun environment where meaningful conversation could occur.

When mentors perceived their mentees are benefiting from the mentoring experience and they are making a meaningful difference in their mentees' lives, they are more likely to remain dedicated to the mentoring relationship for a longer period of time (Dubois and Karcher, 2013). Almost 95% of mentors reported excellent or good relationships with their mentees, and most mentors (83%) reported the mentoring relationships as extremely/mostly helpful for their mentees.

Mentors provided many examples of how their relationships developed and what a positive difference it made for the child. Their anecdotes illustrated the struggles involved in developing relationships and the feelings of triumph when they observed signs, big and small, that indicated success. While some mentors expressed concern about whether their time with their mentees was helpful, they also indicated that they valued the relationship.

Table 2. Significantly higher percentages of mentors engaged in a variety of child-focused activities with their mentees, than in the prior school year.

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Talking/listening	93.0%	88.9%
Playing games/ art or craft activities	64.8%	73.1%*
Discussing problems or feelings	44.3%	38.3%
Trying out activities suggested in Future Matters	7.7%	7.8%
Reading	23.5%	23.1%
Supporting academic development	28.2%	23.7%
Engaging in outdoor activities	20.8%	17.4%

Source. Seedling mentor Survey, 2013-2014.
Note. *Significantly different (p<.05).

Research says..

Close mentoring relationships may be difficult to build and be influenced by the developmental stage of the child and prior relationships with adults (Dubois et a., 2011). Younger children often reported better friendships and tended to have longer lasting relationships with their mentors than did older children. Older youth, who were in the process of establishing independence, were often less emotionally available. Peer and romantic relationships also competed for their attention in and commitment to their mentoring relationships (Schwartz, Rhodes & Chan, 2011).

"As the school year drew to an end, my mentee asked if I would be back next year. I said that it was my plan to continue mentoring her for as long as she wanted and the program allowed. She told me she wanted me to be her mentor through college! I was so proud to hear her mention college because I don't think she saw that as a possibility when I first started seeing her. This reinforced my belief that my time spent with her is making a big difference in her life. I hope other mentors understand just how important that 30 minutes a week can be."
2014 Mentor

"Our bond has grown over the years. I look forward to many more together!
2014 Mentor

"Just when I wonder if he is too cool for me...I saw him scowl in the lunch line when he didn't see me waiting and then for a brief moment he lit up when he did. He's getting to an age that he doesn't want to stand out in front of peers, but he still wants the private time."
2014 Mentor

Most Seedling mentors indicated ongoing commitment to the program. Overall, 99% of mentors reported their overall Seedling experience as *excellent* or *good*, and 82% planned to continue their relationship with the mentee in the next school year. In a separate survey for program planning and growth administered at the end of the school year, 42% of Seedling mentors responded to questions about assisting with mentor recruitment and overall program growth (Table 3). Eighty-one percent of the respondents indicated they would invite friends or colleagues to be mentors.

Table 3. Many Seedling mentors were willing to assist in program growth activities.

	Response Percent
Invite 3-5 friends or colleagues to be mentors	80.9%
Set up a date for Seedling to make a presentation at your office to recruit mentors	22.7%
Encourage your employer to participate in sponsoring a Seedling fundraising event	18.4%
Become a monthly donor	10.6%

Source. Mentor Survey for Planning and Growth, Spring 2014

What did School Contacts and teachers report about the mentoring relationships?

While School Contacts were highly supportive of the program, and while they were not able to spend enough time with many of the mentors and mentees to assess specific outcomes for individual students, they reported the mentees and mentors were happy with the program. Ninety-three percent of the School Contacts reported the mentors to be *extremely well/well prepared*. Approximately 81% of the School Contacts described the quality of the mentors as *excellent, and 19%* described the quality of the mentors as *good.*

Teachers also provided contextual information for understanding the possible mentoring outcomes for the mentees who were in their classrooms. Like the School Contacts, the teachers often may not have witnessed all of the mentoring sessions; yet they were overwhelmingly positive about the program. Ninety-five percent of the teachers recommended their student(s) continue in the program. Teachers reported mentees experienced positive changes in their temperament (66%), interpersonal relationships (66%), academic efforts (58%), and classroom behavior (57%) during the school year (Appendix 5) as a result of the mentoring relationship.

Research says..

Rhodes (2002) reported that teachers noted substantial improvements in student attitudes, behaviors, confidence, relationships, and academic performance for students in mentoring relationships. Their reports were highly correlated with report card data, and their impressions appeared to be consistent with actual progress.

Almost half of the teachers provided additional comments regarding Seedling's Promise. They applauded the quality of program implementation and praised the work of the mentors. They recognized mentor dedication, following their mentees from school to school and coming consistently each week throughout the school year. Teachers shared the difficult circumstances of their students and their realistic expectations regarding mentee personal and academic growth throughout the school year. However, they also described many instances where their students realized personal and academic benefits as a result of their mentorship.

"I think this is a wonderful service that is crucial to building confidence and trust in these young students. It is unfortunate we, as teachers, cannot have the one on one time with the students that need it most. Without a mentor, many students would fail to experience a dependable, trustworthy relationship that they so desperately need in their lives."

2014 Teacher

"My student has a lot of transitions going on right now. He will be moving and that has effected his behavior tremendously. He often refuses to get work done, or shuts down completely. He also will not speak about what is going on outside of school. He can be a very sweet kid or he can be quick to make poor choices. His moods have been changing quickly lately."

2014 Teacher

"Due to the huge void or a feeling of loss by children with incarcerated parent(s), they often feel lost, sad, and with a lack of motivation. The mentor frequently gives the mentee a sense of purpose and hope. The Seedling Mentors always seem like they care and are very genuine."

2014 School Contact

What did the mentees say about their mentoring relationships?

Mentee survey results indicated the presence of a child-centered program where mentees were positively engaged and satisfied with their mentors (Table 4, Figure 6, Appendix 2). On survey items pertaining to a youth centered relationship, most mentees indicated mentors took their preferences and interests into account. The survey results revealed most mentees enjoyed their mentoring relationships and were emotionally engaged in it. Seedling mentees also were highly satisfied in their mentoring relationships.

Figure 6. Most mentees highly rated items (rating of 3 or 4) pertaining to their mentoring relationships.

Youth satisfaction	90.3%
Youth centeredness	91.0%
Emotional engagement	92.0%
Closeness	93.8%
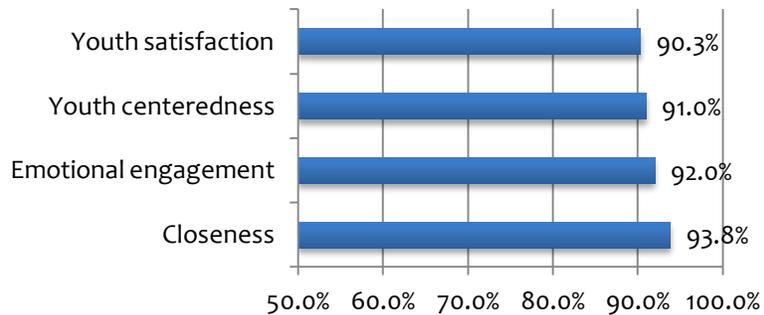
Source. Mentee Survey, Spring 2014

Mentees' positive perceptions of the mentoring relationship could influence their behaviors and attitudes outside of the mentoring relationship. In a study of mentoring relationships (NREL, 2002), mentees were more likely to show improvement in their behaviors and attitudes when they felt their mentors were interested in them, when they liked being with their mentor, and when they were satisfied in their mentoring relationships than were those who had less favorable impressions.

In contrast to years past, an analysis of outcomes revealed student responses at the middle and high school levels were increasingly positive and similar to those at the elementary level (Table 4). Compared with the prior school year, there was a significant increase in the emotional engagement of Seedling mentees overall, and at the elementary and secondary level. Emotional engagement was significantly related to the length of the mentoring relationship.

Table 4. A year-to-year comparison revealed a significant increase in the emotional engagement of Seedling mentees overall, and at the elementary and secondary level.

Part 1: Qualities of Mentoring Relationships						
	Elementary		Secondary		All	
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2012-2013	2013-2014	2012-2013	2013-2014
Youth-centeredness	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.6
Emotional engagement	3.0	3.6*	2.8	3.5*	2.8	3.6*
Youth satisfaction	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5

Source. Mentee Survey, Spring 2014

Notes. The results of this section of the survey are analyzed as recommended in a technical assistance packet published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL). Scores >3 are considered positive. * Significantly different (p<.05).

In 2013-2014, new questions were added to the Seedling Mentee survey to better gauge program influences on program participants and included measures of hope, engagement, and academic self-confidence. Survey items pertaining to hope came from the Children's Hope Scale and assessed the child's perceived capacity to find pathways to their goals and the motivation to use those routes (Snyder, 2003). Additionally, items from the Austin ISD Student Climate Survey (Orr and Lamb, 2014) pertaining to student engagement and academic self-confidence were included. Items concerning student engagement assessed the extent to which students enjoyed school and believed their schoolwork was relevant and engaging. Items concerning academic self-confidence assessed students' motivation and self-efficacy.

> **Research says...**
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> Hope, engagement, and feelings of well-being are robust predictors of academic success. Hope drives attendance, credits earned, and grade point average. Engagement, the enthusiasm and involvement in school, is a factor influencing the performance level of students. Well-being, or how an individual's life is perceived, predicts future academic success (Gallup, 2012).

Overall, the average ratings by Seedling mentees indicated most of them were hopeful, engaged in school, and academically self-confident. (Table 5, Figure 7). Elementary Seedling mentees' ratings were significantly higher than were those of their secondary peers in the areas of engagement and academic self-confidence. This pattern was consistent with district level results. Higher levels of mentee satisfaction and school engagement were significantly related to match length.

Table 5. Survey ratings by Seedling mentees indicated most were hopeful, engaged in school, and academically self-confident. Elementary Seedling mentees' ratings were significantly higher than were those of their secondary peers in the areas of engagement and academic self-confidence.

	All	Elementary		Secondary	
	Seedling	Seedling	AISD	Seedling	AISD
Hope	3.3	3.4	NA	3.3	NA
Student engagement	3.2	3.5*	3.3*	2.7	2.8
Academic self-confidence	3.5	3.6*	3.6*	3.3	3.2

Source. Mentee Survey, Spring 2014

Notes. Scores >3 are considered positive. * Statistically significant (p<.05).

Figure 7. Most mentees highly rated survey items pertaining to hope, school engagement, and academic self-confidence (ratings of 3 or 4).
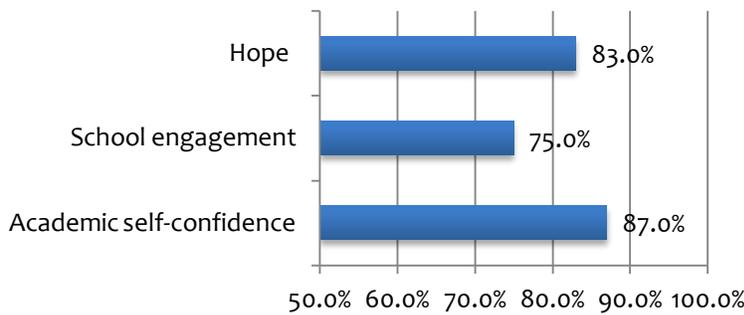
Source. Mentee Survey, 2014

> **Research says…**
>
> Dubois and Karcher (2013) state that a critical feature of relational satisfaction is "closeness". When mentoring relationships are characterized by feelings of connectedness, sharing, and feelings of care, the relationships are likely to last longer and lead to better outcomes for the mentees.

On the 2013-2014 mentee survey, mentees were asked to assess the "closeness" in their mentoring relationships. Overall, almost 94% of mentees reported being close to their mentor. Greater percentages of mentees at the high school (84.6%) and elementary (76.6%) levels indicated they were "pretty close", in contrast to mentees at the middle school level (53.7%). Middle school students had a greater variation in their responses about closeness to their mentors. These variations may be influenced by the developmental characteristics of the child and by the length of the mentoring relationship.

> **The best thing about my mentor…**
>
> "She helps me when I need help and she cares for me. I love her like a mom."
>
> "He always makes me smile!"
>
> "When I have a problem she will listen and help me solve it."
>
> "She is funny."
>
> "She makes me feel special."
>
> "He loves spending time with me and is respectful."
>
> "He's a real cool, outgoing person and can talk about anything."
>
> *2014 Seedling Mentees*

Finally, mentees were asked whether they planned to attend college after high school. Sixty-nine percent of all Seedling students responded "yes" to this question. Greater percentages of Seedling elementary school students aspired to attend college, compared with Seedling middle and high school mentees (Table 6). The aspirations of the mentees at the elementary level were similar to elementary students across the school district. Greater percentages of Seedling middle and high school mentees responded "maybe", compared with other middle and high school students across the district. Few students did not aspire to attend college.

Table 6. Sixty-nine percent of all Seedling students responded "Yes", I will go to college after high school.

	Elementary		Middle School		High School	
	Seedling	AISD	Seedling	AISD	Seedling	AISD
Yes	76%	77%	66%	75%	58%	75%
No	<1%	2%	2%	3%	0%	3%
Maybe	23%	22%	32%	22%	42%	22%

Source. Mentee Survey, Spring 2014

Attendance Outcomes

The overall attendance rate for Seedling mentees was comparable to the Austin ISD average of 95.0% and to student comparison groups (Table 7). Mentee attendance rates ranged from 62.6% to 100%, with a median of 96%. Almost 60% of mentees had attendance rates greater than the district average of 95%. Seedling mentees in Del Valle ISD had a comparable attendance rate of 94.8%.

When examining results by school level, attendance rates for elementary level students were significantly higher than those at the secondary level (Table 7). At the secondary level, Seedling mentees had a significantly greater attendance average than in the prior year and compared with waitlist and comparison group students. Secondary level students on the Seedling waitlist had significantly lower attendance rates than did Seedling mentees and the comparison group.

Table 7. Average attendance rates were significantly different between the elementary and secondary levels. At the secondary level, Seedling mentees had a significantly greater attendance average than in the prior year and compared with waitlist and comparison group students.

	Elementary 2012-2013	Elementary 2013-2014	Secondary 2012-2013	Secondary 2013-2014	All 2012-2013	All 2013-2014
Seedling mentees	95.9%*	95.3%*	91.8%	93.3%*	94.2%	94.7%
Seedling waitlist	95.0%	95.4%*	94.2%	89.3%*	95.0%	94.2%
Comparison group	95.9%*	95.8%*	92.1%	92.5%	95.2%	94.8%

Source. AISD student attendance files, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. *Note.* *Significantly different (p<.05).

Average attendance rates increased for Seedling participants overall in 2013-2014 compared with the prior school year (Table 8). Mentees who were in a mentoring relationship in the 2013-2014 school year for less than 3 months had a significantly lower attendance average compared with mentees participating for longer periods of time. Mentees participating for more that 24 months had a significantly lower attendance average compared with those participating for 3 to 24 months. Notably, over half of the mentees (55%) who had participated for 24 or more months were in middle or high school.

Table 8. Seedling mentees who were in a mentoring relationship for less than 3 months had a significantly lower attendance average compared with mentees participating for longer periods of time. Mentees who had higher ratings of their school engagement were more likely to have higher attendance rates.

	Seedling Participants 2012-2013	Seedling Participants 2013-2014
Less than 3 months	93.3%	93.7%*
3 to 12 months	94.9%	95.3%
12 to 24 months	94.4%	95.5%
24 or more months	92.8%	94.0%*

Source. AISD student attendance files, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. *Note.* *Significantly different (p<.05).

Further analyses were completed to explore how student-and school- level characteristics may have been related or influenced attendance rates. As found in the prior school year, students who were in elementary school and/or who were English language learners were more likely to have higher school attendance (p<.05) than other student groups. Also, mentees who had higher ratings of their school engagement were more likely to have higher attendance rates (p<.05).

Seedling mentee attendance rates were found comparable to other students within their schools, and this finding is considered positive. The mentees were a highly mobile population and have experienced circumstances that negatively influenced regular school attendance. School attendance is a widely recognized predictor of academic success and dropping out of school. The regular school attendance of most mentees is an important factor in their overall school success.

Discipline Outcomes

How did teachers describe student behavior in school?

In the 2013-2014 school year, elementary level teachers continued to report positive changes in their students' dispositions and behaviors on the annual Seedling survey of teachers (Appendix 5). Sixty-six percent of teachers reported their students' general disposition and classroom interpersonal relationships improved throughout the school year as a result of the program, and almost 57% of the teachers surveyed thought their students' behaviors improved throughout the school year as a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program (Figure 8). When asked about behaviors in class, it appeared that most Seedling mentees were respectful of others and were compliant with classroom expectations (Table 9).

Figure 8. Over half of the teachers surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that their students' behaviors improved throughout the school year as a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program.

- Strongly agree or agree
- Strongly disagree or disagree
- Not Sure

19.4%
23.9%
56.7%
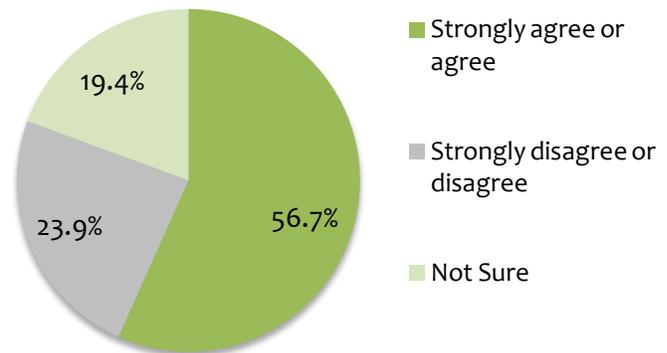
Table 9. Most teachers considered mentees respectful and reported they followed school and class rules.

The student…	Strongly agree or agree	Strongly disagree or disagree
works without disturbing others.	66.2%	33.1%
respects school personnel.	84.2%	15.8%
follows school and class rules.	77.5%	25.6%
respects others' rights and property	79.7%	20.3%

Source. Seedling Teacher Survey, 2014

"My student this year was an exceptional case. While the behaviors have had their moments in being really negative, he has had moments where he works really hard and cares a lot about his work and others."

2014 Teacher

Teachers described challenges their students were experiencing and their appreciation of the mentors' support in open-ended survey questions. Many teachers described student behaviors and often made recommendations for continued relationships in the next school year. Teachers often reported that the mentoring relationships appeared to have a positive influence on

"This child has really made great strides in his behavior. He really makes an effort to work cooperatively and to complete all his assignments. He really looks forward to seeing his mentor every Wednesday. They seem to have a great relationship!

2014 Teacher

student self-esteem and motivation, as they began to see children happier and increasingly more engaged in the classroom. At the same time, some teachers did not see any change in student behaviors but believed the consistent and positive support of the mentor was very important for the child.

What did the discipline data reveal about mentee disciplinary outcomes?

An analysis of disciplinary data revealed that Seedling mentees, Seedling waitlist students, and the matched comparison students had similar types of disciplinary offenses (Table 11). Most of the infractions were characterized as being lower-level offenses, and most of these infractions did not require removal from the classroom. While all three student groups had offenses categorized as *physical aggression with other students* and *fighting*, Seedling mentees did not have *physical aggression with adult* or *drug possession* appear on their "top ten list" of most frequent offenses.

Table 10. Seedling students had similar types of disciplinary offenses, compared with their peers.

Top 10 Disciplinary Offense Types, 2013-2014		
Seedling Mentees	**Seedling Waitlist**	**Comparison Group**
1	Insubordination	Disruption	Rude to adult
2	Rude to adult	Rude to adult	Insubordination
3	Physical aggression w/ student*	Physical aggression w/ student*	Disruption
4	Fighting*	Insubordination	Leave without authority
5	Disruption	Fighting*	Physical aggression w/ student*
6	Class cut	Threat/harassment of student	Fighting*
7	Leave without authority	Drug possession*	Drug possession*
8	Attendance	Rude to student	Class cut
9	Rude to student	Attendance	Rude to student
10	Did not attend detention	Leave without authority	Threat/harassment of adult**

Source. AISD Student Discipline files, 2013-2014
Note. *Categorized as higher level offense

An analysis of students who had any type of discipline offense, aggressive behavior offenses, or home or in-school suspensions during the school year revealed a few differences among the student groups (Table 11). Significantly lower proportions of elementary students across all three groups had any type of offense compared with those at the secondary level. Significantly lower percentages of the comparison group students had any type of disciplinary offenses, compared with Seedling and waitlist students. A significantly higher percentage of Seedling students at the elementary level had any sort of disciplinary offense, compared with the comparison group at that school level (Table 11). At the secondary level, a significantly greater percentage of waitlist students had any type of disciplinary offense, compared with Seedling mentees or the matched comparison group. Fifty-

> **Research says…**
>
> Mentoring can become a corrective experience for children who have had poor relationships with parents or other caregivers (Grossman et al, 2011). Mentors provide an opportunity for children to express themselves and model effective behavior and communication. This relationship helps children to better understand, express, and regulate their emotions. Even so, children with severe relational difficulties, such as aggressive and antisocial behaviors, may be more resistant to behavioral change and may need more comprehensive interventions than volunteer mentors can provide (Schwartz, Rhodes, and Chan, 2011).

nine percent of mentees in Del Valle ISD had some type of disciplinary offense, most of which were low level offenses.

The percentages of students who had discipline offenses categorized as aggressive behavior were relatively low when compared with overall disciplinary offenses (Table 11). A higher percentage of Seedling waitlist students had aggressive behavior offenses, compared with Seedling and comparison group students. However, there was not a statistically significant difference among all three groups. Further, significantly higher percentages of waitlist students experienced in-school or home suspensions and had significantly higher average number of offenses (Table 13), compared with Seedling and comparison group students.

Among Seedling mentees, a significantly higher percentages of those who had participated for more than 24 months had some sort of disciplinary offense (Table 12). It should be noted that over half of the mentees participating for over 24 months were in middle or high school, and disciplinary rates overall are often higher at the secondary level due to the school climate and developmental stages of the students.

Table 11. Significantly lower proportions of elementary students across all three groups had any type of offense compared with those at the secondary level. At the secondary level, significantly greater percentage of the Seedling waitlist students had disciplinary offenses, compared with Seedling mentees and comparison group students.

	Elementary			Secondary			All		
	Seedling	Waitlist	Comp Group	Seedling	Waitlist	Comp Group	Seedling	Waitlist	Comp Group
Any Type Discipline Offense	25.1%*	20.5%*	9.6%*	58.8%	72.7%*	41.9%*	34.4%	31.0%	18.5%*
Aggressive behavior	2.0%	4.6%	1.5%	8.6%	13.6%	16.1%	3.5%	6.4%	5.6%
Home/ In-School Suspension	<1.0%	16.7%	<1.0%	20.5%	31.2%	26.9%	12.2%	23.5%*	19.3%

Source. AISD student discipline files, 2013-2014.

Note. *Statistically significant at p <.05.

Table 12. A significantly higher percentage of Seedling mentees participating for more than two years had some sort of disciplinary offense, compared with other mentees.

	Any Type Discipline	Aggressive behavior	Home or In-school suspensions
Less than 3 months (n=69)	33.3%	2.9%	13.0%
3 to 12 months (n=146)	28.7%	2.7%	4.8%
12 to 24 months (n= 116)	28.4%	4.3%	12.1%
24 or more months (n=123)	47.1%*	4.0%	17.2%

Source. AISD student discipline files, 2013-2014.

Table 13. Seedling waitlist students at the secondary level had a significantly higher average number of discipline offenses, compared with Seedling and comparison group students.

	Seedling	Seedling Waitlist	Comp. Group
Elementary	0.6	0.8	0.2
Secondary	4.4	6.4*	5.8
All	1.7	1.9	1.7

Source. AISD student discipline files, 2013-2014.
Notes *Statistically significant at p<.10.

Further analyses were completed to explore how student- and school- level characteristics may have been related to disciplinary outcomes. Seedling mentees who reported higher levels of school engagement on their program surveys were less likely to have disciplinary offenses. Elementary students were less likely to have aggressive behavior offenses or receive suspensions than those at the secondary level. Male students were more likely to have disciplinary offenses for aggressive behaviors or to receive suspensions.

Disciplinary outcomes for Seedling mentees with disciplinary infractions were comparable to other students within their schools, and most of the offenses were not serious in nature. This finding is considered to be positive, as children of incarcerated parents are more likely to display antisocial behaviors, like disobedience, aggression, temper tantrums, lying or stealing, than children who do not have parents who are incarcerated (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). While the higher percentages of Seedling mentees in middle and high school with disciplinary infractions exceeded those at the elementary level, it must be recognized that they often are struggling to develop identities and are peer focused.

Academic Outcomes

How did teachers and mentees describe student academic behaviors?

Teachers and mentees described academic outcomes on program surveys. Most teachers perceived most Seedling mentees to be engaged in the classroom, as they put forth effort to the best of their abilities, were open to learning, and participated constructively in class (Table 14). About 58% of teachers reported their students' academic efforts improved throughout the school year, as a result of the children's participation in the mentoring program. Almost 72% of the mentees at elementary and secondary levels reported they tried to do their best on schoolwork (Table 15); however just over half of them felt successful in their schoolwork.

Table 14. Increased percentages of teachers reported mentees were academically engaged in their classrooms.

The student...	2012-2013		2013-2014	
	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree
does the best he/she can.	64.7%	33.8%	70.7%	28.6%
puts forth effort on academic activities.	73.4%	25.2%	77.5%	21.1%
participates constructively in class.	72.9%	25.0%	74.6%	25.4%
is open and receptive to learning.	77.9%	19.3%	82.8%	15.6%

Source. Seedling Teacher Surveys, 2013 and 2014

Table 15. Most mentees reported that they tried their best on schoolwork in 2013-2014.

Student Academic Self Confidence	Most of the time	Much of the time	Some of the time	Little or none of the time	Avg.
I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.	64.9%	20.9%	12.0%	2.1%	3.5
I am/was well prepared to take the STAAR test.	62.4%	26.9%	7.0%	3.8%	3.5
I try hard to do my best work.	71.8%	19.1%	8.5%	0.5%	3.6
I feel successful in my schoolwork.	53.1%	32.3%	12.5%	2.1%	3.4
I can reach the goals I set for myself.	64.1%	27.6%	5.7%	2.6%	3.5

Source. Seedling Mentee Surveys, Spring 2013 and 2014.

What were Seedling outcomes on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)?

The STAAR reading and math test outcomes were examined for each student group (Table 17). On the STAAR reading and math tests, significantly greater percentages of elementary students met the state passing standards on the reading and math STAAR tests than did secondary students, regardless of whether they were Seedling mentees, waitlist, or comparison group students. Significantly greater percentages of comparison group students met the state passing standard, compared with Seedling and waitlist students. In Del Valle ISD, 40% of Seedling mentees met the state passing standard in reading, and 47% of them met the state passing standard in math.

Table 17. On the STAAR Reading and Math tests, significantly greater percentages of comparison group students overall met the state passing standard, compared with Seedling and waitlist students. Significantly greater percentages of elementary students met the state passing standards on the reading and math STAAR tests than did secondary students.

	Elementary			Secondary			All		
	Seedling (n=210)	Waitlist (n=38)	Comp. Group (n=192)	Seedling (n=86)	Waitlist (n=15)	Comp. Group (n=79)	Seedling (n= 294)	Waitlist (n=53)	Comp. Group (n=271)
STAAR Reading	63.9%*	73.7%*	72.4%*	41.9%	46.7%	54.4%	57.5%	66.0%	67.2%*
STAAR Math	61.4%*	57.9%*	66.7%*	37.2%	38.5%	57.1%	54.4%	52.9%	63.9%*

Source. AISD STAAR files, 2013-2014.
Notes. *Statistically significant at p <.05. Only reading and math test results for third through eighth grades were reported. Cell size results for high school students taking end of course exams and for mentees who participated in the program for less than three months were often less than five students and may be identifiable.

However, there were significant differences found among Seedling mentees when the length of program participation was considered (Table 18). A significantly greater percentage of mentees participating in the program for two years or more met the state passing standard on their STAAR reading tests, compared with the other mentees. A significantly lower percentage of mentees participating in the program for three months or less and a significantly greater proportion of mentees participating for 12 to 24 months met the state passing standard on their STAAR math tests compared with the other mentee participation groups. Compared with their own performance in the prior school year, a significantly greater proportion of mentees participating in the program for the first time in 2013-2014 passed the STAAR math test (Table 19).

Table 18. A significantly greater percentage of mentees participating in the program for two years or more met the state passing standard on their STAAR reading tests. A significantly lower percentage of mentees participating in the program for three months or less met the state passing standard on their STAAR math tests compared with the other mentee participation groups.

	STAAR Reading	STAAR Math
Less than 3 months (n=43)	53.5%	37.2%*
3 to 12 months (n=84)	52.4%	53.6%
12 to 24 months (n=82)	57.3%	64.6%*
24 or more months (n=87)	64.7%*	54.0%

Source. AISD STAAR files, 2013-2014.
Note. *Statistically significant at p <.05.

Table 19. Compared with their own performance in the prior school year, a significantly greater proportion of mentees participating in the program for the first time in 2013-2014 passed the STAAR math test.

Seedling 3 to 12 Month Participation, 2014	2013	2014
STAAR reading	57.3%	52.4%
STAAR math	46.9%	53.6%*

Source. AISD STAAR files, 2013-2014.
Note. *Statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Further analyses were completed to explore how student- and school- level characteristics may have been related to or have influenced STAAR passing rates. Mentees reporting higher academic self-confidence levels on their surveys were significantly more likely to meet the STAAR passing standard in reading ($p<.05$). Students who were categorized as limited English proficient also were less likely to meet the passing standards in reading and in math.

> **Research says...**
>
> Schwartz, Rhodes, Herrera (2012) suggested that academically vulnerable youth may experience significant academic benefits from mentoring in programs that met after school or during lunch. Differences in the amount of time spent together and how the time was used influenced academic outcomes. Relationship-focused activities were associated with greater benefits to mentees and greater levels of mentor satisfaction than more goal-oriented or academically-focused activities (Karcher, 2007; Karcher, 2008b).

What does all of this mean?

In considering the program outcomes, it is important to think through the context in which the program is implemented. Seedling mentees were similar, in that, they all have been experiencing significant life challenges associated with the incarceration of a parent. Parental incarceration affects children emotionally, developmentally, socially, and academically. Mentees also had a plethora of unique talents to be supported and needs to be met within the mentoring relationship. Thus, the mentoring program was implemented in a complex environment.

Seedling's Promise was found to be a research-based, well-implemented program designed to provide the children with long-term, positive mentoring relationships, so they may be better able to navigate the challenges experienced during parental incarceration. The mentoring relationships were child-centered and tailored to match the unique needs of each mentee. In this venture, mentees were provided with well-trained, committed mentors. The mentoring matches continued to exceed the national averages for both school and community based mentoring programs.

As evidenced in program surveys, high quality mentoring relationships were developing and being well supported. More than 90% of Seedling mentees reported mentoring satisfaction, emotional engagement in their mentoring relationship, and closeness to their mentors. Mentees at the secondary level had significantly increased emotional engagement ratings, compared to those in the prior year. Further, their emotional engagement was significantly related to the length of their mentoring relationships. This finding is noteworthy, as mentoring research often stresses that relationships are especially difficult to develop and maintain with older youth.

Seedling's Promise also may have assisted the mentees' to develop or maintain positive attitudes towards and connections to school. Survey ratings by Seedling mentees indicated they were hopeful, engaged in school, and academically self-confident. While survey ratings at the elementary level were significantly higher than were those of their secondary peers in the areas of school engagement and academic self-

confidence, the ratings of Seedling mentees at the secondary level were not different from their peers across the district.

Seedling mentee mentoring experiences and developing attitudes towards school may have influenced their academic outcomes. However, the exact nature of how these elements might be related cannot be fully explained at this time, as their relationships are complex. For example, higher levels of emotional engagement in mentoring relationships, higher levels of mentee satisfaction with the mentoring experience, and higher levels of school engagement were significantly related to match length. Match length, higher ratings of school engagement, and higher ratings of academic self-confidence were significantly related to student academic outcomes (e.g. attendance, discipline, and state assessment results) in this evaluation.

Apart from the overall results for Seedling mentees, program outcomes for Seedling mentees at the secondary level warrant further reflection. Not only did mentees at the secondary level report significantly higher levels of emotional engagement in their mentoring relationships in 2013-2014, they also had similar survey ratings in the areas of school engagement and academic self-confidence, compared with their peers across the school district. Seedling mentees had significantly higher attendance rates and significantly lower disciplinary rates than did the waitlist students at the secondary level. These findings are important, in that, one might expect their personal circumstances coupled with the developmental attributes of young adulthood to result in diminished levels of school engagement and academic self-confidence. Ratings of school engagement and academic self-confidence were positively correlated with better attendance, discipline, and academic outcomes. Table 20 provides an overview of outcomes for all Seedling mentees.

Table 20. Summary of Outcomes for Seedling Mentees, 2013-2014

Indicator	Desired outcome met among Seedling mentees?	Positive outcomes for Seedling mentees by school level?	Positive outcomes for Seedling mentees by match length?	Positive outcomes for Seedling mentees compared with waitlist students?	Positive outcomes for Seedling mentees compared with comparison group?
Lasting relationship	Yes	NA	NA	NA	NA
Positive attitudes	Yes	Yes (p. 11-13)	NA	NA	NA
Attendance	Yes	Yes (p. 14)	Yes (p. 14)	Yes (p. 14)	No (p. 14)
Discipline	Yes	Yes (p. 17)	Yes (p. 17)	Yes (p. 17)	Yes (p. 17)
Academics	Yes	NA	Yes (p. 19-20)	No (p. 19)	Yes (p.19)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the statistics provided in current literature, Seedling's Promise addresses a real need in the community. Mentees were provided with long-term, positive mentoring relationships, and multiple research studies have shown enduring mentoring relationships can result in significant improvements in children's relationships with their peers, family members, and other adults. Over time, healthier relationships and improved self-esteem or self-confidence may influence the achievement of short- and long-term academic benefits for the child and create a strong foundation for a bright future. Evidence from this evaluation indicates many Seedling mentees are experiencing positive outcomes that affect their current situation and may set them up for future success.

Each year, insight is gained through the evaluation process and ideas are developed to continuously improve the study of mentee outcomes. Seedling's Promise is expanding well beyond Austin ISD, and plans will be developed to collect comparison group data from other districts to report more comprehensively on program outcomes. Additionally, the 2014 survey editions yielded additional information not collected in past years that helped to further explain student outcomes. However, the current survey methodology only obtains the perceptions of mentees participating for at least 9 months. Consideration might be given to expanding the survey administration to mentees who have participated for less than 9 months as well. This information may assist in capturing nuances in the development of mentoring relationships and outcomes for the mentees. Finally, mentees may also participate in additional support services provided by Seedling's Promise. Future evaluations also will consider additional levels of support provided to mentees along with their mentoring and academic outcomes.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Description of Statistical Analyses

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data were used in this evaluation study. School Contacts, teachers, mentors, and mentees completed program surveys designed to determine the quality of program implementation, describe mentoring relationships, and identify mentee outcomes. Student attendance, discipline, and state assessment data were provided by Austin Independent School District (AISD) to determine outcomes for program participants.

Due to availability, only data for Seedling mentees, eligible students who were on the program waitlist, and a matched comparison group who were enrolled in AISD during the 2012-2013 school year were examined in this report. Mentees attending schools outside of AISD were not included in the student due to data availability. The Seedling mentees (n=479) included in the analyses had participated in the program and were still actively enrolled in AISD schools in the spring of 2013. Seedling waitlist students (n=108) also were still actively enrolled in AISD schools in the spring of 2013. Comparison students (n= 479) were actively enrolled in the same schools with Seedling mentees and were matched based on shared demographic characteristics and school of enrollment.

A variety of data analyses were employed in this evaluation and are described below.

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics is the term given to the analysis of data that helps describe or summarize data in a meaningful way that enable patterns in the data to emerge. Descriptive statistics are very important in providing a visual picture and interpretation of the data. Some descriptive measures that are commonly used to describe a data set are frequencies, percentages, means, medians, modes, minimum or maximum values of the variables, and effect sizes. Descriptive statistics do not, however, allow us to make conclusions beyond the data we have analyzed or reach conclusions regarding any hypotheses we might have made.

Inferential statistics. Inferential statistics are concerned with making predictions or inferences about a population from observations and analyses of a sample. Inferential statistics enable us to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data alone. The following analyses were utilized in this study:

- **T-tests.** The t-test is a statistical test that is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the mean or average scores of two groups. A t-test asks whether observed differences between the outcomes of interest for the student groups were greater or lesser than would be expected only by chance.
- **Analysis of variance (ANOVA)**. ANOVA also refers to statistical tests used to analyze the differences between group means. Doing multiple two-sample t-tests would result in an increased chance of committing a type I error. A type I error leads one to conclude that a supposed effect or relationship exists when in fact it doesn't. For this reason, ANOVAs are used in comparing three or more means (groups or variables) for statistical significance.
- **Z-Tests for the difference between proportions**. The z-test test is used when the variable is categorical (e.g. Seedling or non-Seedling) to answer the question of whether the groups in question differ significantly based on a single characteristic (e.g. attendance, discipline).
- **Multi-level modeling**. Multi-level modeling is a type of regression analysis designed to handle data nested within hierarchical structures. For example, student program participants are nested within

different schools, and the statistical testing should address both the characteristics of the student and of the school. The purpose of this type of analysis is to explain or predict the relationships among multiple variables, often of different types. In this evaluation study, predictor or explanatory variables used in the analyses included student demographic variables (e.g., race/ethnicity, economic status, English language learning, etc.), levels of program participation (e.g. participation or non-participation, length of mentoring relationship), and school characteristics (e.g., school level and percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-proceed lunch). A chart depicting the multi-level models explored in this study is provided below.

Table. Summary of multi-level models used in Seedling's Promise evaluation, 2012-2013

Student Predictors (Level 1)	Outcome			
	Attendance Rate	Discipline Offenses	STAAR: Met standard	Length of mentoring match
Race/ethnicity	x	x	x	x
Economic disadvantage status	x	x	x	x
Gender	x	x	x	x
English language learner	x	x	x	x
Special Education	x	x	x	x
Program participation	x	x	x	
Length of overall program participation	x	x	x	
Length of current mentoring match	x	x	x	
Student survey responses	x	x	x	x
School Predictors (Level 2)				
% Free/reduced priced lunch program participants	x	x	x	
School level	x	x	x	x

Appendix 2: Mentee Survey, Spring 2014

Seedling mentees (n=213) who were 9 years or older and who participated in the program for at least 9 months were asked to complete a survey. Part 1 of the survey used questions from the *Measuring the Quality of Mentor- Youth Relationships* Survey, originally developed for the evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies. The questions addressed youth-centeredness, emotional engagement, and satisfaction in the relationship. Part 2 of the survey contained questions from Austin ISD's *Student Climate Survey* (2013) and Snyder's *Children's Hope Scale (1997)* to describe mentee perceptions of their engagement, academic self-confidence, and sense of hope. Overall, 90% percent of the mentees completed a survey, and 65% were elementary, 28% were middle school, and 7% were high school students.

Part 1: Measuring the Quality of Mentor- Youth Relationships	Very true (4)	Sort of true (3)	Not very true (2)	Not at all true (1)	Avg. rating
My mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me.	78.5%	16.8%	4.2%	0.5%	3.7
Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something, then we don't do it.	3.7%	11.5%	14.7%	70.2%	3.5*
My mentor is always interested in what I want to do.	85.9%	12.0%	1.6%	0.5%	3.8
When I am with my mentor, I feel mad.	1.6%	2.1%	3.7%	92.6%	3.9*
My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things.	42.9%	46.1%	7.3%	3.7%	3.3
It helps me when my mentor gives me advice.	79.9%	13.8%	3.7%	2.6%	3.7
I wish my mentor spent more time with me.	55.9%	23.9%	11.2%	9.0%	3.2
When I am with my mentor, I feel important.	72.2%	23.0%	4.3%	0.5%	3.6
I do not tell my mentor some things, because my mentor might tell someone else.	6.8%	8.9%	17.4%	66.8%	3.4*
When I am with my mentor, I feel happy.	84.2%	12.1%	2.1%	1.6%	3.8
When I am with my mentor, I feel disappointed.	1.6%	2.1%	8.4%	87.9%	3.8*
My mentor comes to see me when he or she is supposed to.	64.4%	28.8%	5.8%	1.0%	3.5
When I am with my mentor, I feel bored.	2.6%	8.9%	7.9%	80.6%	3.7*
When something is bugging me, my mentor listens while I talk about it.	85.1%	9.6%	3.2%	2.1%	3.8
My mentor and I are pretty close.	70.7%	23.6%	4.2%	1.6%	3.6

Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, Spring 2014.
Notes. * Item was reversed coded for survey reliability purposes. The average rating reported was normalized to ensure consistent interpretation of results. It is desirable to have an average response rating of at least 3.0.

| Part 2: Mentee Perceptions	Most of the time (4)	Much of the time (3)	Some of the time (2)	Little or none of the time (1)	Avg. Rating
Student Hope					
I think I am doing pretty well.	62.5%	25.5%	10.9%	1.0%	3.5
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.	58.0%	290%	9.3%	3.6%	3.4
I am doing just as well as other kids my age.	53.6%	29.2%	15.1%	2.1%	3.3
When I have a problem, I can come up with a lot of ways to solve it.	41.7%	37.5%	14.1%	6.8%	3.1
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.	53.4%	29.5%	11.9%	5.2%	3.3
Even when others want to quit, I know I can find ways to solve the problem.	52.1%	33.3%	12.5%	2.1%	3.3
Student Engagement					
I like to come to school.	52.6%	25.0%	15.1%	7.3%	3.2
I enjoy doing my schoolwork.	39.4%	34.7%	16.1%	9.8%	3.0
My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways.	52.8%	32.6%	10.4%	4.1%	3.3
I have fun learning in my classes.	55.2%	25.0%	16.7%	3.1%	3.3
My teachers connect what I am doing to my life outside the classroom.	41.1%	30.0%	20.0%	8.9%	3.0
I receive recognition and praise for doing good work.	55.5%	28.8%	11.0%	4.7%	3.3
Student Academic Self Confidence					
I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.	64.9%	20.9%	12.0%	2.1%	3.5
I am/was well prepared to take the STAAR test.	62.4%	26.9%	7.0%	3.8%	3.5
I try hard to do my best work.	71.8%	19.1%	8.5%	0.5%	3.6
I feel successful in my schoolwork.	53.1%	32.3%	12.5%	2.1%	3.4
I can reach the goals I set for myself.	64.1%	27.6%	5.7%	2.6%	3.5

Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, Spring 2014.
Notes. It is desirable to have an average response rating of at least 3.0.

Mentee Aspirations: I will go to college after high school.
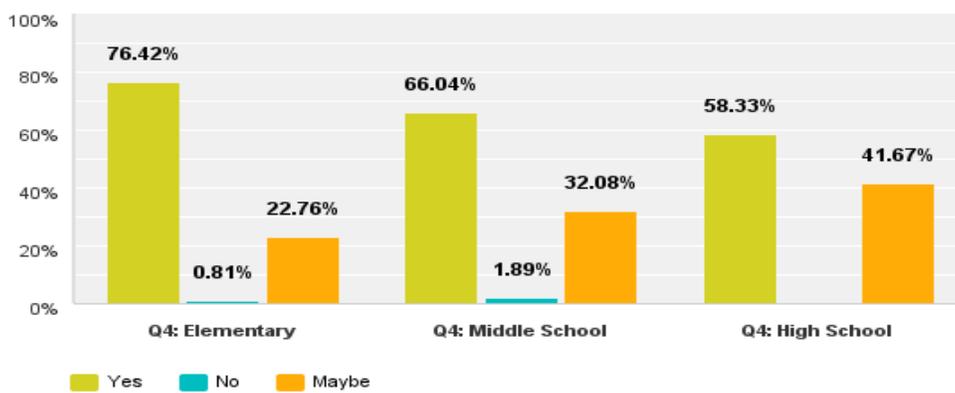
**Mentee-Mentor Closeness:** My mentor and I are pretty close.
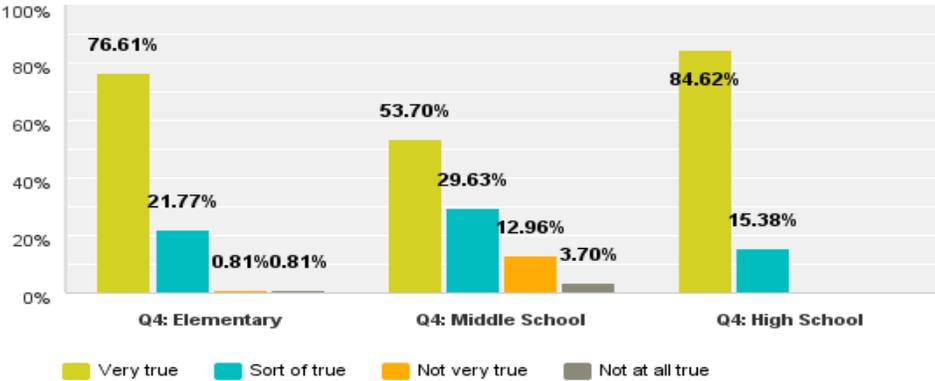
Appendix 4: Seedling Mentor Survey, Spring 2014

To elicit feedback on program implementation and outcomes for the 2013-2014 school year, Seedling mentors were asked to complete a comprehensive survey. Some questions were related to specific mentoring materials and training processes. Results for these questions were shared with program staff for planning and continuing improvement purposes and will not be presented in this document. Instead, survey questions focused on mentor satisfaction and their perceived student outcomes are summarized in this document. Most of the mentor survey results were consistent with results from prior year.

A web-link to the survey was emailed to 545 mentors with verified email addresses in May 2014, and 64% responded as of July 2014. Of those responding, 41% were mentors who just completed their first year in the mentoring program and 59% mentored in previous years. This response rate was determined to be representative of the group at a 95% confidence level.

New Mentors

1. **Please indicate how satisfied you were with the following activities:**
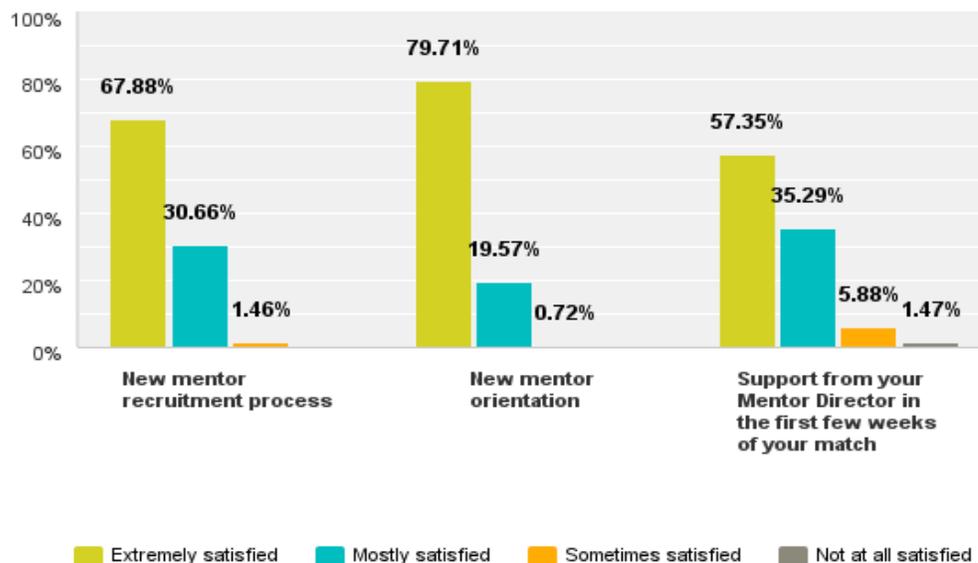
2. **New Mentor Support:** A Mentor Orientation Manual and selected articles were provided for new mentors to support their mentoring experiences. About 42% of new mentors reported they referred to their mentoring manual for ongoing support. Almost one-third of the new mentors did not refer to their manuals because they felt totally proficient. Others reported they did not refer to the manual because they were too busy (18%), had misplaced it (14%), or "other" reasons (41%). Ninety-seven percent of new mentors reported they received articles emailed to them throughout their mentoring experience, and they read all or some articles. About 75% of the new mentors thought the articles were extremely (25%) or mostly helpful (50%).

Returning Mentors

3. How many school years have you been mentoring with Seedling?

7-9 years
14.03% (31)

2 years
36.65% (81)

5-6 years
17.65% (39)

3-4 years
31.67% (70)
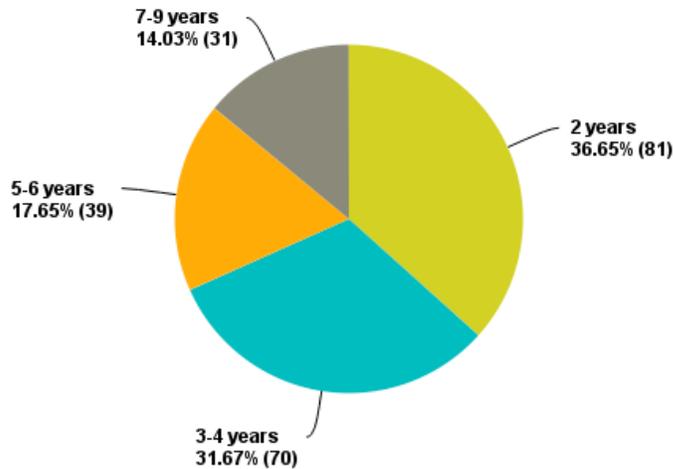
Seedling Staff Support

4. **Mentor Director Helpfulness:** About 44% of mentors contacted their Mentor Director and rated their helpfulness, compared with 53% of mentors who contacted their Mentor Director in the 2013-2014 school year. Almost 93% of mentors reported Seedling Mentor Directors to be extremely or mostly helpful in 2013-2014.

Response Percent, 2013-2014	
Extremely helpful	59.4%
Mostly helpful	33.3%
Sometimes helpful	5.1%
Not at all helpful	2.1%

Note. Question changed from prior year and past results could not be reported comparably.

3. School Contact Helpfulness: Sixty percent of mentors contacted their School Contact and rated their helpfulness. Almost 87% of mentors reported School Contacts to be extremely or mostly helpful in 2013-2014.

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Extremely helpful	67.0%	59.9%
Mostly helpful	22.2%	26.9%
Sometimes helpful	8.5%	10.3%
Not at all helpful	2.3%	3.0%

4. Would you describe your campus as "friendly" to mentors?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Extremely friendly	70.3%	70.1%
Mostly friendly	25.4%	23.7%
Sometimes friendly	4.0%	5.6%
Not at all friendly	<1.0%	<1.0%

5. Monthly training: About 39% of mentor survey respondents reported attending one or more of the monthly training sessions and almost all of them reported the sessions to be extremely or mostly helpful. Of those who did not attend, 52% reported they could not get away from work more than one day a week; 24% could not attend sessions during the lunch hour; 27% preferred training in the electronic newsletter, 16% preferred online training, and 5% did not think the topics were relevant to their mentoring situation. Mentors had mixed responses when asked to identify factors that would increase their training participation, and they suggested alternate training times, places, and topics.

6. As a result of the training sessions I received, I feel more confident in the mentoring experience.

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Yes, definitely	39.7%	31.3%
Somewhat	18.2%	13.3%
No, definitely not	<1.0%	<1.0%
Not applicable. I did not attend any training sessions.	41.8%	55.1%

Experience with Mentee

7. How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Excellent	50.8%	52.5%
Good	43.8%	42.1%
Fair	4.7%	4.2%
Poor	<1.0%	1.0%

8. On average, how often do you see your mentee?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Weekly	87.7%	89.3%
Less than weekly	12.3%	10.7%

9. Mentoring Frequency: Of those who reported seeing their mentee less than once a month, 43% saw their mentee three times a month and 49% saw their mentee twice a month. Less than 5 mentors reported seeing their mentee less than once a month. When mentors were asked to explain reasons for not seeing their mentee weekly, work obligations and mentee absenteeism were most often cited.

10. When I spend time with my mentee, we most often engage in the following activities (select all):

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Talking/listening	93.0%	88.9%
Playing games/ art or craft activities	64.8%	73.1%
Discussing problems/processing feelings	44.3%	38.3%
Trying out activities suggested in Future Matters	7.7%	7.8%
Reading	23.5%	23.1%
Supporting academic development	28.2%	23.7%
Engaging in outdoor activities	20.8%	17.4%

11. Do you believe that your time together was helpful for your mentee?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Extremely helpful	37.2%	34.6%
Mostly helpful	43.5%	48.8%
Sometimes helpful	14.3%	13.3%
Not at all helpful	1.0%	<1.0%
Do not know	4.0%	2.7%

12. How do you rate your overall experience with the Seedling Foundation's Mentoring Program?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Excellent	74.8%	75.5%
Good	24.3%	23.4%
Fair	1.0%	1.0%
Poor	0.0%	<1.0%

13. Do you plan on continuing your relationship with your mentee next year?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Yes	80.3%	82.3%
No	8.7%	8.4%
Undecided	11.0%	9.3%

14. If you cannot continue your relationship with your current mentee in the next school year, would you be interested in mentoring another child?

	Response Percent, 2012-2013	Response Percent, 2013-2014
Yes	33.9%	27.9%
No	15.3%	22.9%
Undecided	49.2%	49.2%

Appendix 5: Seedling Teacher Survey, Spring 2014

Teachers of the children participating in Seedling's Promise were asked to complete a short survey. Considering school-level structures and resulting teacher-student relationships, only elementary level teachers were asked to complete a survey for Seedling participants in their homerooms. Sixty-three percent of the teachers responded. Overall, teacher responses were highly positive and were consistent with survey results from previous years (Looby, 2009 -2013). Results from the survey follow.

1. In my class, the child…

	Strongly agree or agree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Not Sure
does the best he/she can.	70.7%	28.6%	<1.0%
puts forth effort on academic activities.	77.5%	21.1%	1.5%
works only as hard as necessary to get by.	38.0%	61.2%	1.5%
does more than is required of him/her.	44.0%	56.0%	0%
participates constructively in class.	74.6%	25.4%	0%
is open and receptive to learning.	82.8%	15.6%	1.5%

2. As a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program, his/her academic efforts have improved throughout the school year.

	Response Percent
Strongly agree or agree	58.2%
Strongly disagree or disagree	21.6%
Not Sure	20.2%

3. In my class, the child…

	Strongly agree or agree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Not Sure
works without disturbing others.	66.2%	33.1%	<1.0%
respects school personnel.	84.2%	15.8%	0%
follows school and class rules.	74.4%	25.6%	0%
respects others' rights and property.	79.7%	20.3%	0%

4. As a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program, his/her classroom behavior has improved throughout the school year.

	Response Percent
Strongly agree or agree	56.7%
Strongly disagree or disagree	23.9%
Not Sure	19.4%

5. In my class, the child...

	Strongly agree or agree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Not Sure
finds it hard to make friends.	15.5%	84.4%	0%
has a lot of friends.	78.5%	21.5%	0%
is popular with others his/her age.	74.1%	45.4%	3.0%
is confident in communicating with others.	81.5%	18.5%	0%
trusts and builds relationships with others.	74.8%	20.0%	5.2%
expresses feelings appropriately.	68.7%	29.8%	1.5%

6. As a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program, his/her classroom interpersonal relationships have improved throughout the school year.

	Response Percent
Strongly agree or agree	65.9%
Strongly disagree or disagree	16.3%
Not Sure	17.8%

7. In my class, the child...

	Strongly agree or agree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Not Sure
appears happy most of the time.	76.3%	20.0%	3.7%
looks forward to meeting with his/her mentor each week.	90.4%	1.5%	8.2%

8. As a result of the child's participation in the mentoring program, his/her disposition has improved throughout the school year.

	Response Percent
Strongly agree or agree	65.9%
Strongly disagree or disagree	15.5%
Not Sure	18.5%

9. How often have the child's parents or guardians...

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
come to formal events at school?	8.2%	17.8%	41.5%	32.6%
supported your efforts to work with the child?	23.7%	28.2%	34.8%	13.3%
helped the child with homework or school projects?	12.6%	22.2%	44.4%	20.7%
taken an interest in the child's school behavior and success?	20.9%	26.9%	40.3%	11.9%

10. I would recommend that the child or children in my class continue participating in Seedling's Promise mentoring program.

	Response Percent
Strongly agree or agree	94.0%
Strongly disagree or disagree	3.7%
Not Sure	2.2%

Appendix 6: Seedling School Contact Survey, Spring 2014

To elicit feedback on program implementation and outcomes for the 2013-2014 school year, the School Contact at each Seedling supported school was asked to complete a program survey. Seventy-eight percent of the School Contacts completed a survey. This response rate was determined to be representative of the group at a 95% confidence level.

1. Did you receive support in a timely manner from your Mentor Director?

	Response Percent
Always	87.1%
Most of the Time	12.9%
Sometimes	0%
Never	0%

2.Was your Mentor Director knowledgeable about the policies and procedures of the mentor program?

	Response Percent
Extremely knowledgeable	77.4%
Knowledgeable	22.6%
Somewhat knowledgeable	0%
Not at all knowledgeable	0%
I do not know.	0%

3. Did you experience a sense of partnership with your Mentor Director in the implementation of the mentor program?

	Response Percent
Always	77.4%
Frequently	16.1%
Sometimes	6.5%
Never	0%

4. Which information sources helped you to identify students eligible to participate in the Seedling Foundation's Mentoring program:

	Response Percent
Parent or caregiver	71.0%
Teacher	97.0%
Administrator	64.5%
Seedling Foundation staff	19.4%
CIS staff	32.3%
Dropout Prevention Staff	3.2%
Parent Specialist	29.0%
Family Resource Center	0.0%
Student self-disclosing or referring other students	74.2%
Other (please specify)	29.0%

5. Mentee Identification: When School Contacts were asked about effective strategies to identify and recruit children for participation, School Contacts described multiple strategies. Most of the time, they communicated personally with caregivers, teachers, and the students themselves. Counselors and school registrars often identified eligible students for participation. They reported meeting with or emailing teachers to inform them of the program at the beginning of the school year.

6. Challenges: School Contacts also described challenges they encountered in the program recruitment process. The most prevalent challenge described across school sites continues to be obtaining permission to participate in the program. Often caregivers were concerned about confidentiality or had not told the child about the parent incarceration. Several School Contact reported that families often were concerned about their immigration status being disclosed and would not provide consent for participation. Some School Contacts indicated that the need exceeded the number of mentors available for their school.

7. How would you describe the preparation level of the mentors assigned to children at your school?

	Response Percent
Extremely well prepared	48.4%
Well prepared	45.2%
Somewhat prepared	6.4%
Not at all prepared	0.0%
I do not know.	0.0%

8. How would you describe the overall quality of the mentors recruited by the Seedling Foundation?

	Response Percent
Excellent	80.6%
Good	19.4%
Fair	0.0%
Poor	0.0%
I do not know.	0.0%

9. Do you believe that the time that mentors spent with their mentees was helpful?

	Response Percent
Extremely helpful	90.3%
Mostly helpful	9.7%
Sometimes helpful	0.0%
Not at all helpful	0.0%
I do not know.	0.0%

10. Do you have a sense of how the Seedling mentoring relationships on your campus are progressing?

	Response Percent
Yes	87.1%
No	12.9%

11. Monitoring Relationships: School Contacts described how they were tracking or monitoring the progression of the mentoring relationships in an open-ended question. Almost all of the School Contacts reported they regularly communicate with the students and their mentors. Some School Contacts felt they could not accurately assess the actual progress of relationships, as their responsibilities did not afford them with the time to consistently interact with the mentoring matches.

12. Program Improvements: School Contacts were asked how Seedling staff could improve program services, they overwhelmingly requested more mentors, especially those that were male or Spanish-speaking. School Contacts also suggested campus-specific sharing sessions to provide mentors with a support network at the school.

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September 2014

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