DOES MENTORING MATTER?

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

By

Jason J. Kiss

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Dissertation Committee:

Advisor: Dr. Pamela Ross McClain, Ph.D. P.L. Ross McClain

Committee Member: Dr. Robert A. Martin, Ph.D. Robert A. Martin

Committee Member: Dr. Elaine Makas, Ph.D. Elaine Makas

Committee Member: Dr. Nathaniel B. McClain, Ed.D. Nathaniel B. McClain

University of Michigan-Flint

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores a teacher to student mentoring program designed to improve students' school success traits and social emotional learning in a Semi-Rural Midwestern school district. The program is composed of grade-level small student groups who meet daily. Students work to improve academic skills and social emotional awareness of themselves and others. The goal of the school-based teacher to student mentoring program is to create a safe place in school where all students experience sense of belonging and thrive academically and socially.

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of 6^{th}-12^{th} grade student participants. Qualitative data (student surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews) were analyzed using a descriptive and pattern coding process. Two major themes were identified - development of human relations and focused attention on school success. Three sub-themes emerged in relation to human relations that centered on teacher-student relations, peer-to-peer relations, and learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits. Three sub-themes also emerged in relation to school success that focused on stress relief from academic pressures, core academic support, and academic goal setting.

Student mentees in grades six through twelve were not afraid to share a need for positive and trusted adult relations. They were open to building relationships with teacher mentors. Students understood the make-up of the mentoring program and expected teacher mentors to follow through with instruction. The mentoring program, as shared by students, helped to create a larger environment of caring and understanding in the school.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

A growing number of students are experiencing difficulties in knowing how to maneuver and be successful in a school environment (DuBois, 2014; Jensen, 2017). Therefore, more schools are committing to intentionally teach social emotional skills to students. This educational trend is especially true in low socio-economic school contexts. Two key areas of specific interest to educators are the acquisition of social emotional learning (SEL) and school success traits (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018; Institute on Community Integration, 2018).

Social emotional traits include self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education's What Work's Best in Education sanctioned the Check and Connect Program (CCP) research that defines school success traits. The CCP research defines school success traits as decreases in risk factors associated with student truancy, tardiness, behavior referrals, and dropouts; and increases in the protective factors of student attendance, persistence in school, accrual of credits and school completion rates (Institute on Community Integration, 2018). A teacher to student mentoring program may be an effective means to make gains in closing the achievement gap as indicated by making improvements in the identified social emotional and school success traits.

A teacher to student school mentoring program is a promising delivery model for school mentoring programs as students are more likely to connect with, trust, and accept teachers as mentors (Cannata, 2015; Cavell, 2005; Herrara, 2004). However, what does the field of education and the larger social science field of research tell us about the effectiveness of teacher-

based mentoring programs? How are social emotional learning and school success best configured for the benefit of students? Even deeper yet, how do students perceive these efforts and respond to a set curriculum, an assigned mentor, and instructional SEL time? These are important questions for consideration when trying to assure that teachers are empowered to be responsive to the socioemotional needs of their learners.

Statement of the Problem

In the arena of education, a body of research exists for mentoring as an avenue to build teacher credibility and trust among students (Anda, 2001; Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Herrera, 2004; Jensen, 2017). There is an increasing body of knowledge surrounding the value of mentoring programs to assist youth in acquiring social emotional skills necessary for social and school success traits (CASEL, 2018). Examining the research surrounding student mentoring aspects of youth mentoring to address poverty youth populations. The research further suggests the strength of using teachers as mentors in the mentoring programming (Liou, 2016; McClure, 2010). Further, mentoring programs must be tailored to the organizational structure (Rolfe, 20008). The research base on mentoring does not offer significant understanding into how students perceive mentoring and teacher to student mentoring programs (Liou, 2016; Postlethwaite, 1998). Several studies have included student perception as a small part of a larger data focus which gave insight into measuring student participant understanding while evaluating program goals and academic success (Shaul, 2004; DuBois, 2002). These studies prompt educators to investigate further the role the student plays in the mentoring process for the acquisition of SEL and school success traits. Therefore, a qualitative study on student perceptions of a teacher-student mentoring within a low socio-economic school will explore the unfoldment of the mentoring program from the unique vantage point of the student participants. The qualitative study of the school site's

teacher-student mentoring offers insights on the mentoring process for other schools seeking to implement a school teacher-student mentoring program. The qualitative study design captures the students' perceptions and mentoring and illuminates what works, what doesn't work, and what is important to them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain insight and learn more about students' perceptions and understanding on the acquisition of SEL and school success traits through a mentoring process and to examine this phenomenon within a low SES school-based teacher to student mentoring program. As teacher to student communication is a foundational factor in student success, an intentional relationship can be established through a daily teacher to student mentoring program to enhance students' skills and perceptions as an additional connection to school. This qualitative study sheds light on the student perception regarding the time and energy put into a mentoring program by staff, the value to the students' school success, and the experience of each student. These are essential insights the researcher gained by conducting student surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. As emphasized, research demonstrates students who do not have an individual association in the school tend to be less productive and less successful than students who do (Tierney, Grossman, Resch, 2000). When teachers build a relationship with students based on shared trust and regard, it is valuable to student achievement. At this point, students will perceive teachers are centering on them and the probability of building a positive relationship heightens (Tierney, Grossman, Resch, 2000). As schools endeavor to instruct students, they must allot time to include robust and positive teacher to student connections through mentoring while supporting relationship building and school success traits. The researcher believes students, the

recipients of the process, have valuable information to share and suggestions to contribute to program improvement.

Utilizing perception data from the participating student focus groups revealed the mentoring process' positive and negative perceived impacts. The study, for the collection of perception data, utilized qualitative methods for data collection. The data collection consisted of student surveys and focus group interviews followed by two individual student interviews. The analysis of data through survey summary and interview transcript coding created two types of data collection scaffolding. The scaffolding began with surveying the entire student population, moving to smaller grade-level clustered focus groups and ended with two in-depth student interviews. The second form of scaffolding was the layers of data coding integrating sub-themes to themes.

The findings of the studied mentoring program could guide revisions in the delivery and content to better meet student needs. The data from the qualitative study research may assist other schools attempting to assemble connections between teachers and students to heighten individual student successes. Close attention was paid to the analysis and presentation of the data as it relates to factors identified by students. The students' perceptions of the scheduled mentoring program was an important dimension to the limited body of knowledge on school-based mentoring programs through student eyes.

Research Question

The researcher used a qualitative study method to investigate the following research question: What are students' perceptions of the school-based teacher to student mentoring program?

Importance of the Study

The study provides an in-depth analysis of students' perceptions of their school-based teacher to student mentoring experience. The data can provide valuable observation and feedback to the school and other schools interested in instituting a mentoring program for student success through the acquisition of SEL and school success traits. Also, the study illuminated the use of teacher to student relationships as a path of teaching SEL and school success traits. A review of the literature in Chapter 2 on mentoring demonstrates coaching and guiding projects that are successful in building positive teacher to student connections. These relationships have an impact on a student's ability to be successful in school. In addition, the research demonstrated what relationship traits work best for school success (DuBois, 2014; Jenson, 2017). Adding student voice advanced the knowledge on the subject of mentoring.

Scope of the Study

The study delves into student perception of a teacher to student mentoring program. The population of the qualitative study was 500 sixth through twelfth grade students in a semi-rural Midwest school district. The study covered one school year. The study discussed teacher to student mentoring perceptions from the student point of view.

Foundational curriculum.

The mentoring program studied used the social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum guided by the work of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The nonprofit organization conducted research in conjunction with states, school districts, and researchers to determine SEL competencies. These competencies are the framework and guiding themes of the mentoring program and were used when examining student perceptions and experiences within their program. The CASEL social competencies are

self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2013):

- Self-awareness: Ability to know one's place in the environment in which they live.
- Social awareness: Ability to see the perspective and empathize with others.
- Responsible decision-making: Ability to make decisions based on social norms and ethical standards.
- Self-management: Ability to monitor one's behavior and emotions in all situations.
- Relationship skills: Ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships (p 9).

The program integrated these themes in the activities and interactions of the teacher to student mentoring. Teachers were trained on how to run group conversations through professional development. The expectation is that teachers would work with students in a group setting to increase and understand each SEL competency. The SEL competencies would work in conjunction with each grade level school success curriculum.

The school success curriculum used in the mentoring program is based on the Check and Connect Program at the University of Minnesota (Institute of Community Integration, 2018). The program is run through the Institute of Community Integration on the campus of the University of Minnesota to inform school districts on best practices. The teacher as a mentor helps students to navigate problems with absenteeism, tardiness, and behavioral issues. The teacher regularly checks with students to plan and set weekly goals to increase student engagement and understanding of the role of the student in the school setting. Teachers focus on academic progress Monday and Friday each week. The focus on grades allows, in small chunks, for monitoring of assignments and progress each week. The approach of assessing both the

academic and environment of the student by the mentor and student is key to the fundamentals of the mentoring program (Institute of Community Integration, 2018).

It is important to note the research site school-based mentoring program is overseen by a mentoring committee composed of four teacher volunteers, principal, student advisor, and district curriculum director. A teacher volunteer and the curriculum director co-chair the committee. The committee meets approximately three times a year to address issues in the program.

Research setting and process.

The research setting implemented a teacher to student mentoring program to intentionally teach and monitor student SEL and school success traits. The district has a large low SES population as identified through the free and reduced lunch schedule. A state school improvement grant funds the mentoring program. This qualitative study collected and analyzed student perception data to allow for a more in-depth analysis of the program. The researcher explored the school's student survey, focus group data, and student interviews through a qualitative coding process to gain an in-depth understanding of the positives and negatives within the program as viewed by the student participants. The study used a simultaneous coding process, with an emphasis on descriptive coding using the participants' language and pattern coding looking for patterns in the data (Saldana, 2016). The survey data was analyzed as it represents the entire student body. Following the first level of collection, focus groups from grade-level clusters were coded as a second level of data. To triangulate the data, a trained facilitator conducted two mentoring student interviews. The researcher utilized the student survey, focus group and interview transcripts with permission of the school district. The researcher thinks investigation of the above data is beneficial not only to the current

district/school but also to other districts/schools and nonprofit entities looking to implement a similar process.

Program structure.

The following figure illustrates the levels of the teacher to student mentoring program.

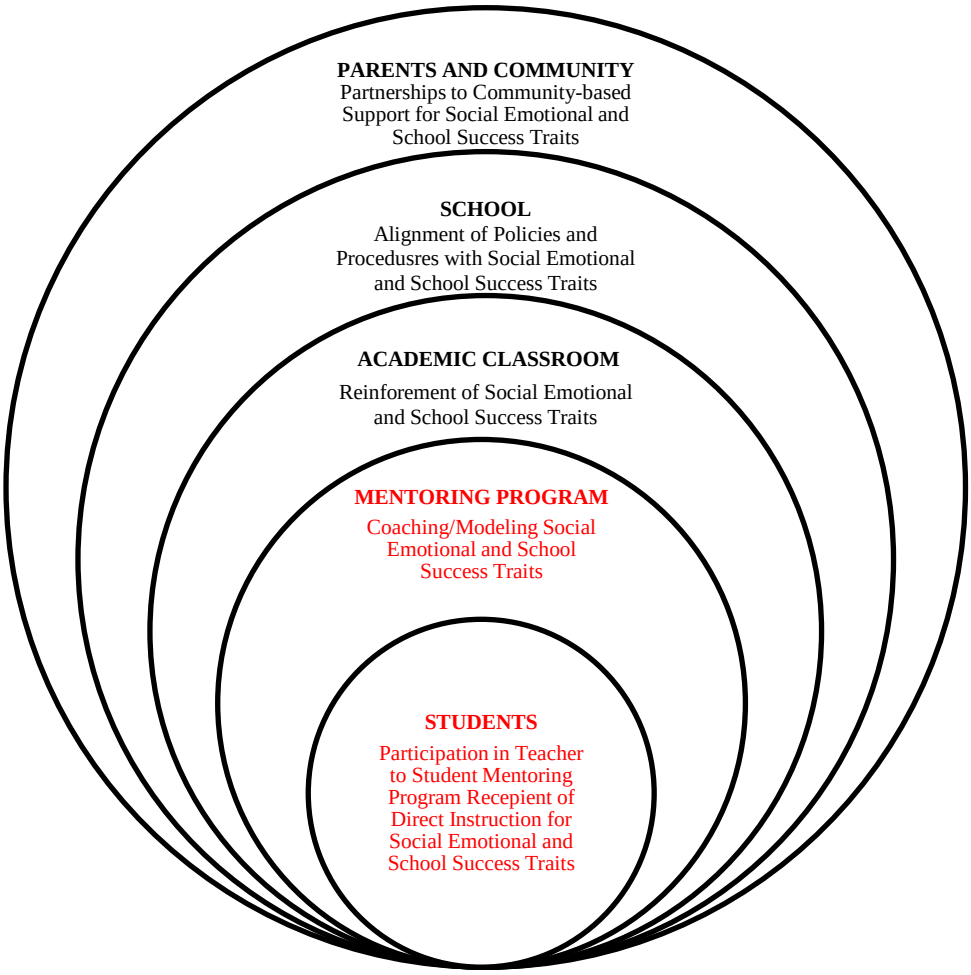

Figure 1: Student Centered Mentoring Program.

The program was designed and implemented as part of a school improvement grant to bridge identified gaps in low SES districts within the state. Each district awarded monies developed its structure and programs for implementation. The study site chose to implement a mentoring program utilizing teachers as mentors within a set mentoring program schedule and curriculum. The mentoring program is centered on students' SEL and success traits. The mentoring program

is intentionally designed to expand into the classroom. The program is supported by district/school policies and procedures (i.e., discipline, attendance, etc.), and is meant to reach out to the parent and community sphere**s.**

The program consists of a thirty-minute class period, five days a week, implemented over the span of the entire school year. The teacher to student ratio is approximately one teacher to twenty students. All teachers are assigned a mentoring class. The students are assigned to a mentor for the year, and each mentoring group is designed to be multi-tiered (mixed academic levels) and diverse in ability, gender, and socio-economic status. The mentoring program teacher begins the program curriculum on relationship building and building trust within the mentoring class.

The mentoring program is semi-structured. On Mondays, students develop their goals for the week, Tuesday is club day, Wednesday and Thursday address the social emotional curriculum and Friday is reserved for progress monitoring and goal review. On Monday and Fridays, the focus is on school success traits with the mentor teacher consulting individually with students regarding academic progress such as missing assignments, failed tests, absences, behavior referrals, etc. Each year sixth – twelfth grade mentoring classes are assigned a social emotional learning theme with an identified curriculum and class materials. The themes are as follows:

- Sixth Grade: Creating a Culture of Kindness in Middle School
- Seventh Grade: Study Skills and Anti-bullying
- Eighth Grade: Life Skills Vocabulary and Teen Law
- Ninth Grade: 20 Best Teen Skills and Drug Awareness
- Tenth Grade: Job and 21st Century Life Skills

- Eleventh Grade: SAT Prep and Money Skills
- Twelfth Grade: Leadership and Critical Thinking Skills

The focus of each skill at grade level is designed to increase with age and give appropriate opportunities for open conversations. These conversations will help to build the relationship between the teacher and student; this is the cornerstone of the mentoring program.

Delimitations and Limitations

One limitation of a qualitative study is the involvement of the researcher in the setting and/or process of data collection. The researcher being the principal of the research building site, distanced himself from the data collection process so as students can speak freely and not try to articulate what they think the principal wants to hear. In the study, this limitation is addressed by the data collection process of focus groups and interviews being facilitated by trained outside facilitators. In addition, the coding will be externally reviewed by two outside research consultants.

A second limitation may result in the inconsistencies of student age, experience, and comfort level with the focus group facilitator and fellow students. Students may have difficulty speaking within a peer group setting. This limitation will be addressed by choosing a detached facilitator, one who is experienced in group dynamics and can create a student focus group atmosphere allowing for honest sharing and feedback. The facilitator will be someone with whom the students feel safe; however, it will not be a teacher or the principal so students do not feel they must give prescribed answers. This limitation will be minimized by students being grouped into similar age groups. For example, a focus group will consist of sixth and seventh grade group and so forth. In this way, a younger student would not have to give an opinion in the presence of an older student.

A third study limitation within a qualitative study is coding data for emerging themes. Emerging themes and sub-themes may be subjective due to the coder having preconceived notions of what he/she wants to find. This limitation will be addressed through external review. Two other research consultants will review the coded data and share with the researcher their findings. The multiple layers of coding will allow for comparison and a truer picture of the emerging data.

Definition of Terms

Key definitions will help the reader to understand the use of vocabulary in the context of the study. The study is based in the educational field, which has vocabulary rich in jargon and regionalism.

1. Semi-structured: Interview questions that have a starting question but allow the answer to develop the rest of the questioning technique.
2. SEL learning traits: Social emotional learning trait skill sets allow students to handle their own emotions and the emotions of others.
3. School success traits: Traits needed to be an effective student in an educational setting.
4. Attendance: Student is at school each day in the educational setting.
5. Persistence in school: Ability of a student to stay in school and engage in the educational setting.
6. Accrual of credits: The tracking of classes (credits) in areas of curriculum to satisfy requirements of a diploma.
7. School completion rates: The rate at which students graduate or earn a diploma in the school setting as calculated by student grade level.

8. Truancy: Regional requirements for school attendance before the state or local law enforcement agencies become involved.
9. Tardiness: Students that are late to school or class in the educational setting.
10. Behavioral referrals: The student referral process from the classroom to the office for behavioral issues.
11. Dropout rates: The rate at which students stop coming to school as calculated by student grade level.
12. Effect size: The impact of a learning strategy, relationship, or program on student achievement.

The above educational terms are commonly used in PreK-12 educational settings and are presented to define and clarify vocabulary usage and questions in the study. Terms used in the educational setting can have meanings that are localized to the setting. Education terms include acronyms and abbreviations that are contextualized to the school setting. This section is intended to clarify any vocabulary questions in the study.

Chapter Summary

There is research demonstrating a growing need for students to feel more connected to the school environment (Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Hansen, 2007; Hattie, 2018). The outside pressures placed on the educational system are growing to augment the shortfalls in student social emotional development and school success traits. The loss of mental health programming and the growing number of students coming from low socio-economic status have complicated the school setting. The study brought the element of student voice to the current program and added insight for schools trying to fill in the societal gaps through school-based mentoring.

Teacher to student mentoring programs are focused on building a positive and trusting relationship. This qualitative study on student perceptions informed and added to the body of knowledge currently in the educational field on student relationship programming. The student viewpoint is the cornerstone of the study. The study created a clearer picture of the teacher to student relationship within programming by adding student voice. The information gleaned from the study will help to inform decisions regarding the mentoring program from students' positive and negative viewpoints. The limitations of this study make it hard to replicate, due to the facts of the setting and participants. The study may inform the greater body of knowledge around mentoring by increasing the knowledge of student voice and perceptions of similar student needs and programming.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mentoring as an educational topic can be seen as a component or application of the humanistic philosophy of education. Humanism is about fostering each student to his or her fullest potential. Humanistic education (also called person-centered or student-centered education) is an approach to education based on the work of humanistic psychologists, particularly the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Ozmon, 2008). Humanistic educational approaches seek to engage the whole person including not only the students' intellect but students' feelings, life, social capacities, and artistic and practical skills. Important objectives include developing student self-esteem, the ability to set and achieve appropriate goals, and student development toward full autonomy (Aspy, 1977; Rogers, 1969). The most renowned humanistic educational approach is Marie Montessori's schools where student choice is central. In humanistic schools, the environment is designed for the student and may often veer from traditional school settings in both physical and educational processes. New emerging forms of humanistic education are concentrating on the growth and implementation of social emotional learning, which can also be embedded in a school-based mentoring program.

The body of literature on mentoring is broad and scattered (Cavell, 2005; Jensen, 2007; Hansen, 2007; Herrera, 2004). It takes many shapes and forms, and a review of the concepts of mentoring and its place in both society and schools must be examined for one to understand school-based mentoring literature concepts and further literature needs. Each component of the existing body of literature is a "piece of a puzzle" enabling a more complex understanding of the role of teacher to student based mentoring programs and ultimately student voice as an important aspect of the literature. Combining all the mentoring "pieces" with student voice can guide the

building of more effective mentoring programs (Jensen, 2017; Moses-Snipes, 2005; Payne, 2005; Baker, 2005; Cavell, 2005).

As demonstrated in Figure 2., the literature review components include: mentoring as an avenue to address societal gaps in youth populations, mentoring as a tool to meet the growing needs of economically disadvantaged students, school mentoring as a tool to address the growing mental health service gaps for youth, mentoring as an avenue to build teacher credibility and trust among students, the strength and effectiveness of mentoring programs and the effective use of teachers as mentors, the necessity of mentoring programs to be tailored to organizational needs and the importance of student perception in a well-rounded picture on mentoring literature.

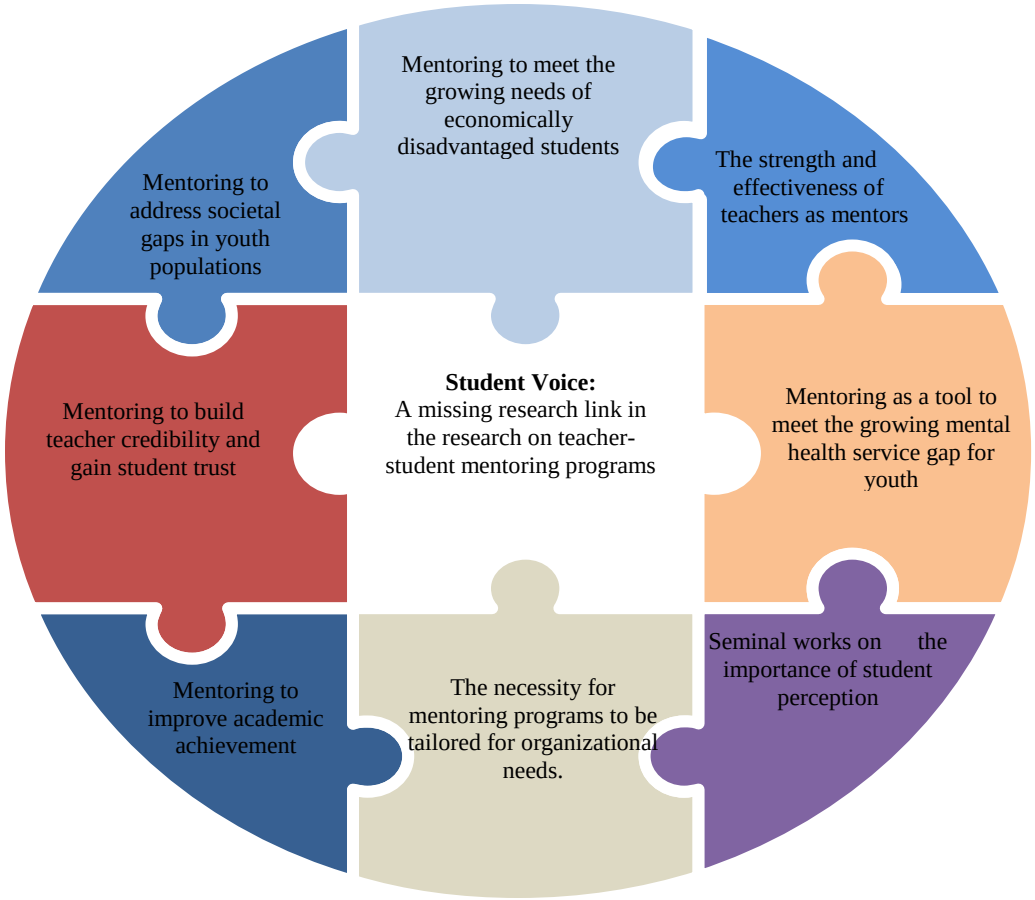

Figure 2: Student Voice: A missing research link in teacher-student mentoring programs.

The purpose of the chapter is to relate themes, findings, and information about the teacher to student mentoring program in the school setting. The diversity of topics surrounding student mentoring requires the researcher and interested readers of mentoring literature to put together a puzzle one piece at a time. Each puzzle piece complemented the understanding of the literature and purpose of the study and demonstrated why the topic of school-based mentoring has become increasingly important.

Conclusively, there is limited student voice in literature based around mentoring programs. The research literature tended to be centered on student achievement and academic results as key indicators of mentoring success. However, engagement of the population being targeted, students, has room to grow in the mentoring literature field and the use of student voice as important to effective mentoring programming and design.

Mentoring as an Avenue to Address Societal Gaps (Single Parent Households, Lack of Direction and Resources)

Changes in family systems and shifting social norms means many children may be receiving less parental support than in the past and maybe discouraged from forming natural mentoring relationships with other adults. Mentoring programs are designed to facilitate appropriate, meaningful relationships between children and adults leading to positive outcomes such as improved social skills and self-esteem (Caldarella, Adams, Valentine, & Young, 2009; Cannata, 2005). An important piece of research around mentoring was conducted by Tierney, Grossman, and Resch (2000), the researchers conducted an impact study centered on the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program. These programs are a mainstay in urban centers where positive adult to child relationships are needed for a growing population of at-risk youth. The study has been duplicated several times to verify mentoring as a forefront of social intervention.

Tierney has testified in front of Congress regarding his research and how important mentoring programs are for youth facing serious obstacles (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

The study established structured approaches to mentoring to help today's at-risk youth overcome such life difficulties as poverty, single-parent households, and lack of direction and resources. The programs in the study were also localized and designed to fit the specific needs of the local community in which they serviced. The basis of the research was a carefully screened set of volunteer applicants who were matched for a one on one mentoring with a youth who had a similar background. The pair would meet three to four hours a month for at least a year. The study selected organizations having a large caseload to provide a valid sampling for the study. The researchers also tracked a control group of counterparts, which were not part of the Big Brothers or Big Sisters program (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000).

The findings of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters study demonstrated positive results in several areas (Tierney et al., 2000). Mentored youth were less likely to initiate drug use during the study. The youth were also less likely to engage in alcohol use and less likely to be involved in physical violence. The mentor was able to get the mentee more involved with the school. The mentored students were missing from school less than the control group counterparts. Relationships with parents were better while the mentee was involved in the program. The program helped the mentees with their relationships relative to peers than their control group counterparts (Tierney et al., 2000). The literature from Caldarella et al. (2009) and Tierney et al. (2000) indicates an important research base to further examine the expansion and use of mentoring programs with challenged youth. The research further examines how school-based mentoring programs may be able to align to the same positive outcomes.

A connection to mentoring and the challenges of at-risk youth combines with the culture in which the youth resides. Programming that involves cultural activities and understanding leads to better student engagement in the classroom. Moses-Snipes (2005) researched the impact of including culture-based activities in the geometry classroom to help African American students understand the material. The data was collected using fifth-grade math student files. The study notes several outside factors affecting African American student success in mathematics, such as parenting, socio-economic status, teachers, and the curriculum. The study integrated cultural diversity in the mathematics classroom to build self-esteem and math skills in African American students. The study looked to increase the use of a new concept entitled ethno-mathematics. The research was conducted in an experimental style. It looked at four fifth grade classrooms with students randomly assigned by the flip of a coin. Two of the groups had cultural activities. Two groups did not have cultural activities. There were 18 African American students whose test results were used in the study. The test was the seventh National Assessment of Student Progress (Moses-Snipes, 2005). The results indicated African American students with cultural activities scored better on the math assessment. The inclusion of cultural activities and building self-esteem through group work settings had a positive impact. Including cultural appropriate curriculum, into a mentoring program can give students a positive perception of the school culture (Moses-Snipes, 2005; Dubois, 2002; Harvey, 1985).

Postlethwaite and Hylan's (1998) research describes the impact of a mentoring program on student achievement and teacher perception data. The study placed teachers at an all-girls school with random students for fifteen-minute mentoring sessions quarterly throughout the year. Students were mentored on targets, progress, and given a chance for one on one conversations about their education. Students in the seventh and twelfth grades were looked at for comparison

to counterparts at grade level who did not receive the mentoring. Data was compared through standardized test batteries and questionnaires completed by students and mentors. Interviews were also held with five selected mentors. The mentored students performed better on standardized tests. SAT scores showed a correlation in mentored students attaining higher levels of proficiency.

Additionally, the study incorporated a qualitative component through the use of questionnaire data from the mentor and mentees. The qualitative survey results showed a positive perception of the teacher to student relationship. The mentoring program built positive perceptions of schooling in the participating students (Postlethwaite and Hylan, 1998). The Postlethwaite and Hylan study was one of the few studies found in the mentoring literature incorporating perception data from students in tandem with the achievement data recorded. The positive findings of the qualitative data invites more research work to be done in the area of student perception for mentor-mentee successful outcomes.

Mentoring as a Tool to Meet the Growing Needs of Economically Disadvantaged Youth

Research on the needs of economically disadvantaged students is an important alignment to the literature base regarding mentoring and students. Economically disadvantaged students generally achieve lower than their non-disadvantaged counterparts and have fewer positive experiences at school (Hattie, 2018). Students identified as low socio-economic status (SES) potentially reap the most significant gains from positive relationships with teachers. The research premise of low SES youth populations supports the growing body of literature regarding the significance of teacher to student relationships. Therefore, the emphasis on building positive relationships between teachers and students ought to be an integral part of secondary schools and

may best lend itself to a mentoring scenario (Anda, 2001; Fruiht, 2013; Jensen, 2017; Dubois, 2014).

The State of Michigan is a good example of how growing poverty affects the ability of society and education to meet student needs. The State of Michigan has seen an increase in poverty over the past ten years. Since the poverty rate is affected by the movement of a population toward resources and is defined as a lack of money and resources, people in poverty are often left behind when people with job skills leave the state for better opportunities. Michigan saw a population decline over a seven-year period between 2005 and 2011 before finally seeing a gain in 2012 (Bureau, 2014). There are numerous reports and literature detailing the gap between the people who have resources and the people who do not have resources (Payne, 2005; Jensen, 2017; Baker, 2005; Cavell, 2005). As with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters study, a well-placed mentoring program can combat educational discrepancies and make connections to alleviate gaps in the poverty cycle (

Poverty correlates with students' ability to be successful in school. In understanding and connecting the pieces of the mentoring literature base it is important to look at presented literature on educational components demonstrated to improve educational success with students of poverty (low SES student populations). Research on poverty has found the importance of relationships in the school setting within the identified low SES population. Students from low SES backgrounds need stronger relationships with teachers in order to thrive in school. Due to the documented decline of the middle class, research describes an increasing gap between the people who have resources and those who do not. Poverty research also suggests that the use of intentional teaching, solid relationships, and understanding of low SES students by educators can

have a positive impact on student achievement (Jensen, 2017; McClure, 2010; Rolfe, 2008; DuBois, 2002).

Research in poverty further identifies, in order to work with students of poverty; teachers need to understand what is going on in the community and around the students. Teachers with the correct skillset, can improve the educational system for students struggling due to the characteristics of living in poverty. The brain development research chronicles how adolescent development is different for students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. Brain development is influenced and affected by the environment in which students live including gaps in child development, medical and mental health, nutrition and other resources. Brain research concludes and aligns with the medical studies on brain development indicating chronic exposure to poverty affects a student's ability to learn and process information. Educators without proper training may view student behaviors connected to the effects of poverty incorrectly and think a student is being lazy or unwilling to follow directions. Students having problems paying attention are viewed as discipline problems (Jensen, 2017; Durlak, 2011; Kelly, 2014; Morrow; 1995). Through child-adult relationships, a mentoring program can make critical connections changing the school culture to improve student achievement and engagement thus curbing the increasing demands of a growing low SES population (Payne, 2005; Jensen, 2017; Hansen, 2007; Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2006).

As poverty increases throughout the country, educators must plan for the new reality by addressing student needs on multiple levels including the social emotional skills of each individual student. Therefore, it is important to the mentoring body of literature to also examine and integrate the body of literature on the effects of poverty on student environment, skills, and societal associations. Payne (2005) presents a concept of economic mobility and key

characteristics of educational needs for students entrapped in the poverty cycle. The concept of economic mobility states that across generational lines those with fewer resources tend to stay at the bottom. Mentoring and relationship building can guide people away from falling victim to economic mobility trends.

Payne's (2005) and Jensen's (2017) research indicates only a small percent of children born to parents at the bottom make it to the top of the income distribution. Of the two-thirds of Americans who earn more than their parents, fifty percent are upwardly mobile, meaning they move at least one rung ahead of their parents on the income ladder. This extensive research completed by Payne (2005) and Jensen (2017) demonstrates a need for steps to be taken in order to address the growing gap. The success of at-risk students in improving negative behaviors. The literature on poverty and mentoring may see the emergence of a critical marriage of poverty and at-risk student programming with an urgent need for literature linking both aspects with student perception (Payne, 2005; Shaull, 2004; Stockard, 1992, Rhodes, 2006).

Education has been one of the critical components of combating a life of poverty in our society. Several researchers have added to the body of knowledge the definitions, components, characteristics of poverty, and working with students affected by poverty. Positive adult relationships can bridge the widening gap and the teacher to student mentoring relationship with low SES students is a key component. The students are more likely to accept personal responsibility and be better equipped to move to higher levels of abilities such as self-regulation and owning their future as is the philosophical foundations of humanistic education (Jensen, 2017; Calderella, 2009, Coyne-Foresi, 2015, Ozmon, 2008).

School Mentoring as a Tool to Address the Growing Gap in Youth Mental Health Services

The gap is also growing in the mental health services for youth which, is adding to the already complex issues of youth and students of poverty (Kelly, 2014; Ellis, 1996; Hansen, 2007). The loss of available mental health services has affected the need for mentoring programs. In Michigan, there is a growing need for schools to identify student mental health issues because of social services program cuts. The fear of privatization for social services and schools is a problem in the State of Michigan as it is in other parts of the country (Lessenberry, 2016). The reduction and/or privatization of mental health services have led to a build-up of anxiety and loss of direction in the mental health system. Financing state mental health services is a growing and essential challenge for policymakers as they work to increase and enhance community-based service systems (Bachman, 1996). Two states have adopted a privatization platform for mental health services. In Tennessee and Texas, each state's mental health services were privatized through non-profit community health centers (Bachman, 1996). Both Texas and Tennessee experienced a slowdown in services when creating memorandums of understanding with local mental health service providers (Bachman, 1996). A slowdown in services is a concern in the State of Michigan for entities inside of the system already working in a complex bureaucratic manner. Schools are not immune to the fallout from a slow down or decrease in the system. In Texas and Tennessee, privatization did not fix many problems including the ability to get needed services to patients under the age of 18 (Bachman, 1996). These practices and policies in state governments cause a void which schools are trying to fill with services such as school counseling, social emotional learning initiatives, and social work programs.

Kelly (2014) researched the impact of reduced mental health services on school-aged children. Teachers and other educational professionals had to take on the burden of students'

mental health needs through school-based programming and services. School-based mental health practitioners worked with educational personnel to align services with mixed results. The exploratory and comparative case study examined three California midsized high schools which included mentoring and counseling programs in the school setting. The study incorporated observation and interview data, which provided multiple sources of information about school and educator interactions with mental health approaches and staff. A key study question was how mental health supports were perceived by educators in the school setting. The findings indicated the majority of teachers had limited background or training in mental health work and although students were willing to express mental health and counseling problems to teachers during interactions, the majority of teachers reported sending students to school-based mental health practitioners for individualized counseling. The study showed a willingness and openness leading to positive results for students. However, a key finding of the study indicated although teachers and mental health workers positions intersected, the two groups rarely collaborated. The study findings indicate the importance of building relationships and seamless transitions between all school-based personnel and students in regards to student mental health needs. Also, the willingness of students to confide in their teachers demonstrated an important connection to be utilized by schools to teach and enhance student social emotional health. However, all professionals in the school setting must work together to build a mental health safety net for students. Thus it is vital to build programs and procedures where all stakeholders within the school interact to support the teacher's role as both classroom teacher and student mentor (Kelly, 2014).

Mentoring as an Avenue to Build Teacher Credibility and Trust Among Students

The following studies indicated the building of trust and relationships with student populations can lead to an increase in academic engagement and student achievement. McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) state, "There is growing evidence that indicates greater personalization – improved, trusting relationships particularly among teachers and students – are able to raise students' expectations for themselves and teachers' expectations for students" (pp. 3-4). Research conducted by McClure et al., (2010) indicates a positive correlation between student achievement and personalization. Furthermore, meaningful connection between teachers and students in the classroom leads to higher self-expectation in students. The ways in which teachers build relationships with students will vary, but decidedly, the interactions must be genuine. For interactions between students and teachers to be genuine, the teacher's actions must put the student before the subject. As platforms to better build personal relationships between the teacher and student, mentoring program evaluations and research (from the teacher and student lens) need to be conducted to help answer the question – how can school-based mentoring be utilized to positively impact student self-expectations (Anderson, 2004; Cavell, 2005; Herrera, 2004)?

Cornelius-White (2007) states "person-centered learning and positive teacher to student relationships are associated with optimal, holistic learning" (p. 113) is consistent with McClure et al., work on person-centered education. A mentoring program focusing on relationships can lead to heightened positive interactions. Students desire authentic relationships where they are trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity (Cavell, 2005; Jekielek, 2002). Therefore person-centered learning can provide the trusting relationships students crave. Person-centered learning is designed to increase educational outcomes, and it

does. Cornelius-White (2007) also found that person-centered teaching had positive impacts on student engagement, student motivation, and student verbal and math skills. Person-centered education involves the kind of teacher to student relationships schools strive to create (Glasser, 1988; Jekielek, 2002; Langhout, 2004).

The teacher to student interaction is a critical factor in student achievement. When positive interaction develops into a relationship built on mutual trust and respect, it is beneficial to students. When teachers focus on the student over the subject matter, the likelihood of developing a positive relationship escalates. The positive relationships built between teachers and students increases academic success. Therefore, as schools attempt to educate students, programs devoted to developing positive relationships between teachers and students is an essential component (Herrera, 2004; Langhout, 2004; Jekielek, 2002).

As indicated by the presented body of literature, many of today's students come from different backgrounds and conditions making school and school success a low priority. Through relationships, a team of intentionally minded teachers and other school leaders can move instruction and the significance of school connectedness to a high priority for students. In subpopulations, for example, financially stressed families' children exhibit an essential need for mentoring practices and the building of stable adult relationships. Research continues to demonstrate that schools with positive student to teacher connections evidence a rise in student engagement, and academic and social emotional skills (Williamson, Modecki, & Guerra 2015). In light of the research, the utilization of mentoring and increased social emotional learning enables and establishes important lines of communication for students. The school is a place of refuge for all students insofar as they feel the school is vested and interested in their success. A

school-based mentoring program provides basic student to school associations thus setting a foundation for student short and long-term accomplishments (Williamson et al., 2015).

Hattie (2018) developed a system of ranking the influences in different meta-analyses related to learning and achievement according to effect sizes. In a groundbreaking study, Hattie ranked 138 influences related to learning outcomes. Hattie found the average effect size of the influences was a 0.40 on the learning influence scale. Therefore, he decided to compare the success of influences to the 0.40 ranking. The comparison was used to find an answer to the question, "What works best in education?" Hattie studied six areas contributed to learning: the student, home, school, curricula, the teacher, and teaching and learning approaches. Hattie not only provided a list of the relative effect size of different influences on student achievement, he also presented the underlying data. Hattie found the key to making a difference was visible teaching and learning and teacher creditability. He further explained his work in the publication "Visible Learning for Teachers." In 2018, Hattie updated the list to 252 factors related to student achievement from 1200 meta-analyses. According to Hattie's update, the data did not change significantly over time – teacher credibility remains one of the most vital influences on what works best with students (Hattie, 2018).

According to Hattie, teacher credibility is vital to learning and students are perceptive in knowing which teachers genuinely care about their success. A key factor of credibility is trust. Hattie states, "If a teacher is not perceived as credible, the students just turn off" (Hattie, 2018). For teachers to gain credibility, a trust must be built between the teacher and the student. Teacher to student programs can enhance the building of credible relationships, through trust, to reduce the distance between teachers and students as a basis for addressing barriers (Hattie, 2018; Cornelius-White, 2007; Williamson et al., 2015).

The Strength and Effectiveness of Teachers as Student Mentors

A leading figure in mentoring research, DuBois of the University of Illinois at Chicago, coedited the *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (2014). DuBois based his research on critical factors related to mentoring and mentoring programs. His meta-analysis on mentoring programs produced essential features needed to build successful mentoring relationships. The first feature is emotional connection or bond between the mentee and mentor. DuBois' key finding complements the work presented in the previous section of credibility and trust between teachers and students. DuBois' work stipulates the mentee/mentor connection develops from a collaborative and trustworthy relationship. A successful mentor is able to provide positive modeling over the course of an extended period of time. Other key findings included pairing appropriate age mentees with proper mentors and mentor skill sets. In DuBois' mentoring research students from low socio-economic status gained skills necessary to have positive interactions with adults. The mentor-mentee relationship, through a mentoring program, was able to supplement the void of important adult interactions thus allowing the mentee to improve communication with adults (Dubois, 2014).

In addition, student mental and physical development played a definitive role in relationship building. How students respond and interact with a mentor is influenced by a student's age and outside influences. In the article, *The Role of Mentor Type and Timing in Predicting Educational Attainment*, Fruiht and Wray-Lake (2013) presented a study comparing the mentor profile and time devoted to the mentee relationship and the ability to predict student achievement. At the middle school and high school level, the study indicated the student to teacher relationship was an important factor in positive student achievement. The researchers found although all mentors can contribute to the social emotional, identity, and cognitive development of youth, teacher mentors were most effective in cultivating skills associated with

student academic success. In addition, in implementing a mentoring program with fidelity, schools studied were able to document positive growth in student perception of school culture. Fidelity in the study referred to program installation at scale in the organization. The fidelity also referred to protocols, procedures, and a consistent framework throughout the organization. The studied mentoring programs showed increases in student achievement on common assessments and standardized tests for students with mentors. Fruiht and Wray-Lake (2013) conclude, "Our findings speak to the potential potency of adult relationships during adolescence and beyond, and suggest that building mentoring relationships at key points in development may be beneficial for educational outcomes into young adulthood" (p. 1459) and "…having a teacher to student mentor was more predictive of educational attainment than having other types of mentors overall" (p. 1469). The teacher as a mentor for students connecting the student to the school setting has become important in school programming. The teacher engaging the whole student along with addressing social emotional needs continues to expand in school programming (Anderson, 2004; Baker, 2005; Shaul, 2004).

The Necessity of Mentoring Programs to be Tailored to Organizational Needs

Another body of mentoring literature concentrates on mentoring programs developed to meet student needs while addressing specific organizational priorities. Examples of research centered on mentoring programs designed to meet specific organizational needs, while meeting the needs of students, can be found in three research studies where organizations concentrated on other identified district/school priorities such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math education), student leadership, and multi-tiered systems of support (Rolfe, 2008, Coyne, 2015, Archard 2012, Keogh, 2006).

Rolfe (2008) presents data regarding tailoring a mentoring program to suit an organization, its people and identified objectives. If an organization were to implement an

effective mentoring program, it must address the organization's challenges and obstacles by investing time in the design process. Combining student and organizational needs means having a set plan and detailed calendar making sure the process is aligned and on task. Therefore it is essential to make sure all individuals are trained and ready to institute focused programming. Program effectiveness can be undermined by unrealistic expectations and confusion regarding the role and responsibilities and goals of mentoring partners thus leading to disappointment, dissatisfaction and heightened frustration (Rolfe, 2008).

Archard (2012) explores the concepts of mentoring and role modeling with regard to developing student leaders in the context of an all-girl school. As a mentoring model, female school staff became role models for female students. The program was created for and focused around gender-based needs through conversations. The role-model type of mentoring program was designed to build confidence with the girls and to help them address gender norms. Mentoring was in the form of informal arrangements, such as occasionally meeting with staff and female students in the commons or library. The research indicated the program created positive perceptions of the involved female students in the area of facing societal gender norms (Archard, 2012).

Coyne (2015), examined a student mentoring program called the Wiz Kidz, located in a Canadian urban elementary school of 420 students. The mentoring program examined students' connectedness to school, peers, and teachers. However, the program was created around group sports and STEM activities. The findings suggest students involved in the Wiz Kidz program enjoyed participating and reported increases in connectedness to school by the end of the school year. Established mentoring relationships through sports and STEM directly impacted students'

relationship with the school setting and addressed a growing need for STEM education (Coyne, 2015).

In a research study by Keogh (2006), mentoring programs for disadvantaged youth were described and evaluated. Keogh described a planned mentoring program in a school setting. The program was put in place to assist in the implementation and success of a multi-tiered system of support. The study focused on mentoring relationships and examined the mentoring relationship within a multi-intervention program. General observations on the youth mentoring program led to recommendations for improvements in student conduct. The students and mentors had conversations concentrating on behavior and impulse control. The program had positive results on student and mentor perception of the school and the students' view of education. There were also positive outcomes in student achievement of the mentored students. (Keogh, 2006).

Designing a mentoring program that is tailored to student and school needs has shown positive results in student perception. Female students have been able to grow in their understanding of gender norms. Students with specialized areas of study continued to grow in confidence with mentors working to develop academic skills. Setting goals and timelines for mentoring programs can increase the effectiveness of the program and the program outcomes. Students from all levels of academic ability can gain from a relationship with a mentor in the school setting (Archard, 2012; Coyne, 2015; Keogh, 2006; Rolfe, 2008).

Seminal Works on the Importance of Student Voice

The body of literature on student/youth mentoring addresses numerous important aspects of the mentoring phenomenon such as economic, behavior and achievement gaps; however, only three studies included student perception as a small component of the findings and results (Archard, 2012; Keogh, 2006; Postlethwaite and Hylan, 1998). Archard included student

perception of the girls who participated in discussions with their role-model mentors demonstrating an increase in mentees confidence surrounding addressing gender norms. Perceptions in Keogh (2006) and Postlethwaite and Hylan (1998) studies included some student perception data to help demonstrate an increase in student feelings of positivity toward school and achievement. In the above-mentioned studies, the use of student perception data was invaluable to measuring participant understanding and evaluating the goals of the mentor programs.

In addition, the ability to preserve one's self-image is important in adolescence. Student perception of his/her educational experience influences academic performance. A student who feels too much pressure may purposely underachieve. Oppositely, a student who believes he/she is functioning at a high level may exert control by underachieving to relieve the stress of performing at increasingly higher levels (Dobson, 1988; Prout, 1999; Stockard, 1992). Therefore student perception is an important aspect in understanding if programming is meeting student self-image needs as related to academic performance.

Understanding students' perception is useful in explaining behavior and interactions with teachers thus helping teachers and students to gain knowledge and meta-cognition in regards to their roles, relationship and success both as mentors and mentees. Students being able to explain their experience and role in the mentoring process are important in revising, replicating and validating school mentoring programs. The student's ability to explain his/her own experience can solve problems in school programming and environment (Glasser, 1988; Ellis, 1996; Prout, 1999).

Since the interaction between people's emotions and behavior shapes the environment in which they live, how people assess the world around them can have a profound impact on how

they interact with the environment. Students sitting in the same classroom and receiving the same instruction may have totally different interpretations of what they learned and how they interacted in class. Students may then take different experiences and lessons away from an instructional/school experience. When students perceive the learning environment as positive, they tend to engage more in learning. Student perception is, therefore, a valuable tool and lens when deciding what is or is not working within the school. Student perception can help schools course-correct current programming and curriculum (Harvey, 1985; Prout, 1999; Stockard, 1992). If student perception is important in understanding and evaluating the learning environment, it is equally important for student perception to frame school-based mentoring programs. The lack of student perception data on school mentoring programs leaves an important gap in the literature.

Chapter Summary

The different literature themes reviewed begin to demonstrate an emerging interrelatedness of youth mentoring needs and programs spilling over into the context of public education. Students need to have a person in the educational system that connects with them in a social and emotional capacity. The philosophy of humanism is based on fostering the best possible outcomes for each child. The educational process of a student through mentoring and whole child approach allows for the connection to education to take hold. Mentoring and the relationship between the teacher and student cannot be left out of the equation of school improvement. Successful schools understand the culture and acknowledge the community. Mentoring students from poverty is a complex use of strategies and must have planned interactions. With the proper framework in place, schools can make strides to get disadvantaged students engaged in the school setting through relationship building. Positive results in

relationship-building translate into better educational organizations and student achievement. Through unstructured questioning, surveying, and interview techniques, data on student perception of mentoring programs can be collected. The results will add another layer and thus constitute a stronger understanding of the mentoring program from the student side.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology as a comprehensive process to study students' perceptions of a teacher to student mentoring program. It outlines the procedures which were taken by the researcher in order to answer the research question. In order to answer the research question, the study focused on student perceptions within the students' school day mentoring experience. The chapter is arranged into the following sections: rationale for the qualitative paradigm, qualitative methods, the researcher's role, data sources, collection and analysis, verification and ethical considerations. A graphic organizer outlines the connection and alignment of the methodology techniques and processes.

Rationale for Qualitative Paradigm

The researcher used a qualitative study approach to investigate the following research question: What are students' perceptions of a teacher to student mentoring program? The research problem was to identify, through student perception data, the successes, problems, gaps or inconsistencies of students' mentoring experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic of the teacher to student mentoring process. The focus of the study best lends itself to a qualitative study method. As the purpose of the study is exploratory and descriptive, a qualitative study and qualitative methods will hone in on the root of the issues (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Frankel et al., further states the best data collection techniques for a qualitative study include participant observations, nonparticipant observations, in-depth and/or selected interviewing, and written questionnaires. The study included a written online student survey, several selected student focus group interviews and member checking through in depth individual interviews. The creditability of this qualitative study is in the use of triangulation, member checking, and external audit. The triangulation was derived from the three main sources

of data: survey, focus groups, and interviews. The member checking was done through the student interviews as the interviews were transcribed then checked for accuracy. The external audit of the coding process was completed by two outside specialists in qualitative research.

Student perceptions of a program designed to build stronger relationships and consistent positive school connections brought forth themes and sub-themes to help improve mentoring programs. The data gives a better understanding of the program processes within the study site. The data also offers findings and suggestions to help inform or shed light on teacher to student mentoring programs for the wider body of knowledge including schools who may be exploring implementing a student to teacher mentoring program.

Qualitative Methods Selected

A qualitative study was the best course of action considering the goals of the research study. The researcher sought to create an in-depth picture of what was going on inside the identified school's mentoring program through the lens of the student participants. Student qualitative input processes gave understanding into what is happening in the program, what are the important themes and patterns, how these patterns connect and the important behavior, events, attitudes, and structures occurring in the program (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Through qualitative methods, the overarching experiences of the students participating in the mentoring program emerged.

Research design and techniques.

In qualitative research, trying to get as many mediums to paint the whole picture is essential to qualitative design (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The research presented was built on three levels of investigation: survey, focus groups, and purposefully selected interviews.

Figure 3. Identifies each data collection technique and illustrates the three stages of the triangulated data collection process.

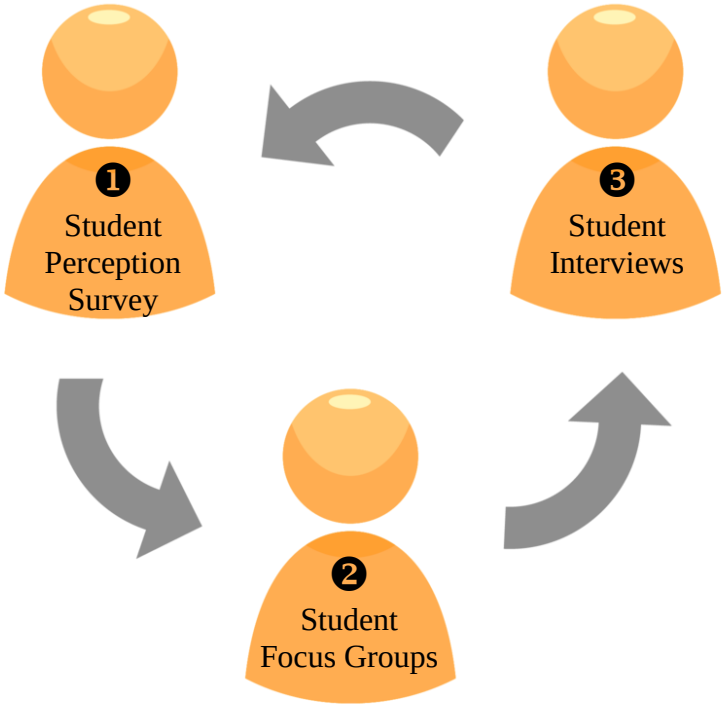

Figure 3: Qualitative Data Triangulation

The data designs and techniques, as shown in the above Figure 3, consist of three layers. The collection of data started with a base survey taken by all students in grades sixth through twelfth who participated in the teacher to student mentoring program. The students were then placed in grade level focus groups and interviewed. The last piece of data came from two senior students who were interviewed and member checked for accuracy. The two senior students were asked to make sure their transcripts were accurate to reflect their perceptions and paint a fuller picture of the mentoring program. Thus, the layering of data painted a rich picture of the program through the eyes of the mentored students. All students were allowed to freely respond to what went well in the mentoring program, what do you think would improve the program, and where

did the program fall short for you or your classmates. Therefore, student surveys, focus groups, and interviews allowed the researcher to gain an expanded picture of the mentoring program as experienced in the research setting.

Student survey.

The first qualitative data collection technique to be utilized was the completion of a short online open-ended survey completed by all sixth through twelfth grade students participating in the site's mentoring program. The survey data was used to set the baseline of student perceptions for which the focus groups added depth and understanding. The two open ended questions in the survey allowed for a free flow of information for the student perspective. The questions were: What do you like about the mentoring program and what do you not like about the mentoring program? This baseline information from all involved allowed for wide variety of perceptions about the program to be expressed and logged.

Focus groups and protocols.

After the survey, a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol was used with student focus groups facilitated by a qualitative researcher. Four leveled student groups, sixth-seventh, eighth-ninth, tenth-eleventh, and twelfth were used so as all students were represented. There were approximately eight to ten students in each group from each of the mentoring grade level classrooms. Also, different leveled student groups revealed a difference in grade level perception of the mentoring program. The questioning consisted of two open responses centered on mentoring successes and challenges as experienced by the students. A third question was asked to the students about if they wanted to add anything else to the conversation. The questions were designed in such a way as not to lead the students but allow the data to emerge from the student participants. The student group questioning was conducted after the completion of a minimum of

one year in the mentoring program for students in grades sixth through twelfth. A note-taker was in the focus group setting to take down information as it occurred. The note-taker reviewed all information with the facilitator after each focus group session for accuracy.

Student interviews.

The third qualitative data collection technique was the use of two one-on-one interviews with outgoing senior level students. These students had the longest tenure in the mentoring program and could express the most informed sentiments, observations, and analysis from their extended time in the program. The semi-structured interview questions allowed for a free flow of information and a deeper understanding of the mentoring program for triangulation. The questioning investigated and gave a deeper understanding of the students' perception of the program. The interviews were conducted by a qualitative researcher.

Site location.

The research site is a semi-rural sixth through twelfth grade high school with a population of 538 students and 32 teachers. All students and teachers participated in the teacher to student mentoring program. This semi-rural school sits on the outskirts of two urban centers with high crime, poverty, and high unemployment rates. The area is isolated as water surrounds it on two sides. The geography makes it hard to attract new industry without a true thoroughfare for transportation. The urban center problems have moved to the surrounding communities as jobs and industry were depleted from these communities. A large amount of rental homes brought a transient population to the community and school. There are no further industry or job markets within a feasible radius thus setting the community on the edge of a completely rural area. The school has a 75% free and reduced lunch count with the school and community mirroring urban traits and problems.

Setting and mentoring program component design.

The qualitative study examined student perception of their mentoring program. The mentoring program has two goals: the enhancement of social emotional learning traits which is taught through a semi-structured curriculum and professionally defined traits of school success. The mentoring program is a daily thirty-minute instructional block with a teacher to student ratio of one teacher to twenty students. Social emotional learning traits are set by grade level and deal with age appropriate issues. Students stay with the same mentor for the entire school year, although, mentor teachers may share students during certain activities or projects. The mentoring program was in its third year of implementation.

Participants.

The identification of key people and data is vital to any research setting (Mills, 2007). The participants in the study were students in grades sixth through twelfth that participated in the mentoring program during the school year of 2017-2019. The student population is composed of 61percent female and 39 percent male students. The school has a 75 percent free and reduced lunch rate highlighting the large number of low socio-economic students. There is a large subpopulation of special education students at 20 percent per grade level. There were eight to ten students selected for the focus groups by grade level from multiple classrooms. The three classrooms at each grade level represented a diversity of the mentoring program in each focus group. The purposeful selection of student diversity for the focus group population gave a well-rounded picture representative of all students involved in the program. The use of key students did not give a random sampling; however, the bias that may come from a non-random sampling is outweighed by the critical knowledge base, diversity, and experience of the participants.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher is the building principal in the school where the mentoring program is being investigated for this study. The researcher used outside experts in all of the interactions with students. The use of outside experts allowed for the data to emerge without the researcher who works in a position of authority injecting any bias into the research setting. The researcher used simultaneous coding methods with all data (Saldana, 2016). The interview data was member checked to minimize bias and increase the accuracy of the research.

Data Sources

As previously discussed, this qualitative study used three sources of data: a school-wide survey, grade-level focus groups, and two senior class interviews. Figures 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate the layers of the data collection. Each source was used to establish the emerging themes and sub-themes from the data as a whole. These qualitative study sources allowed for the qualitative techniques needed by the researcher to identify human experiences and therefore uncover meaningful patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2003). Each source of data captured a level of emerging ideas, opinions, understandings, and perceptions of participants by collecting firsthand information giving air to their voices with and among each other and in several formats (Williams & Katz, 2001). The participants' perceptions were analyzed for themes and concepts on a growing level of depth to derive a meaningful conclusion from the findings. The study used a simultaneous coding process, with an emphasis on descriptive coding using the participants own language and pattern coding where you are looking for patterns in the data (Saldana, 2016). The researcher first coded all data in order to find patterns. The patterns were then collected into themes and sub-themes from the students' own words.

Data Collection

The data collection for this research involved survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. This triangulation of data through coding and review painted a picture of student perception of the mentoring program. Allowing for themes and sub-themes to emerge and represent the data as a whole body of work.

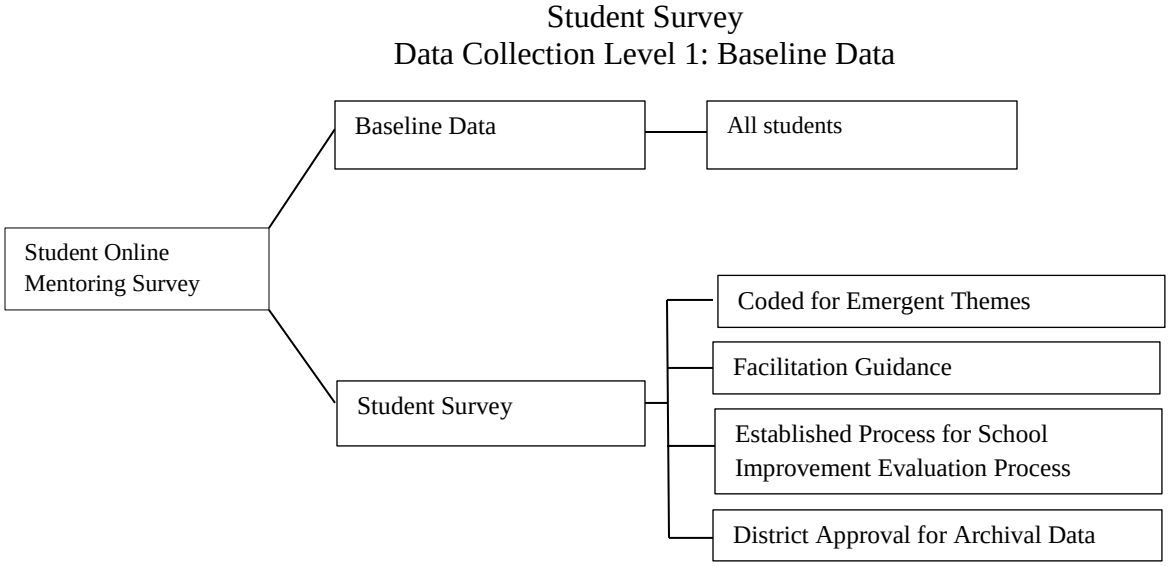

Figure 4: Student Survey Data Collection

Online survey data collection.

The online survey was taken by all students sixth through twelfth grade in the research setting. The questions were developed by the researcher in the school where the mentoring program takes place. The survey data was obtained from two open ended questions. The two questions were: What do you like about the mentoring program? What do you not like about the mentoring program? The researcher coded the data for themes. The researcher used two outside researchers for coding and comparison.

Student Focus Groups
Data Collection Level 2: Main Body of Data

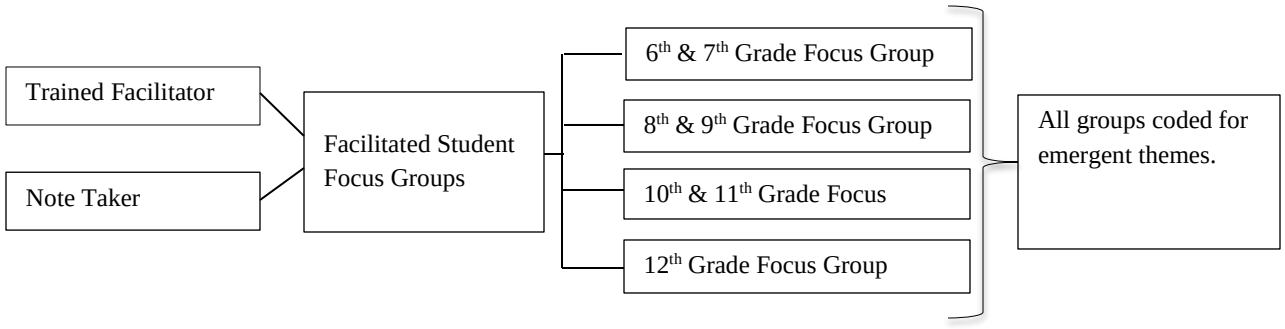

Figure 5: Student Focus Groups Data Collection

Focus group external facilitation.

The focus groups used qualitative methods of questioning which allowed the facilitator to draw from the participants a thorough picture of the site's mentoring program. The facilitator employed by the district had a substantial background in group interactions as a qualitative researcher. The facilitator also had experience in the conducting of focus groups for qualitative studies. The qualitative semi-structured questioning of students on their perception of relationships in the school, with a focus on mentoring, allowed the facilitator to obtain an insightful assessment of the mentoring program. The facilitator allowed the discussion to flow freely for an overall representation of student perceptions of the mentoring program as a whole. Focus group sessions were not taped due to student confidentiality and an environment of student ease; however, a note-taker was present at each focus group interview. All information from the student perspective, about the mentoring program, was processed.

Student In-depth Interviews
Data Collection Level 3: Verification

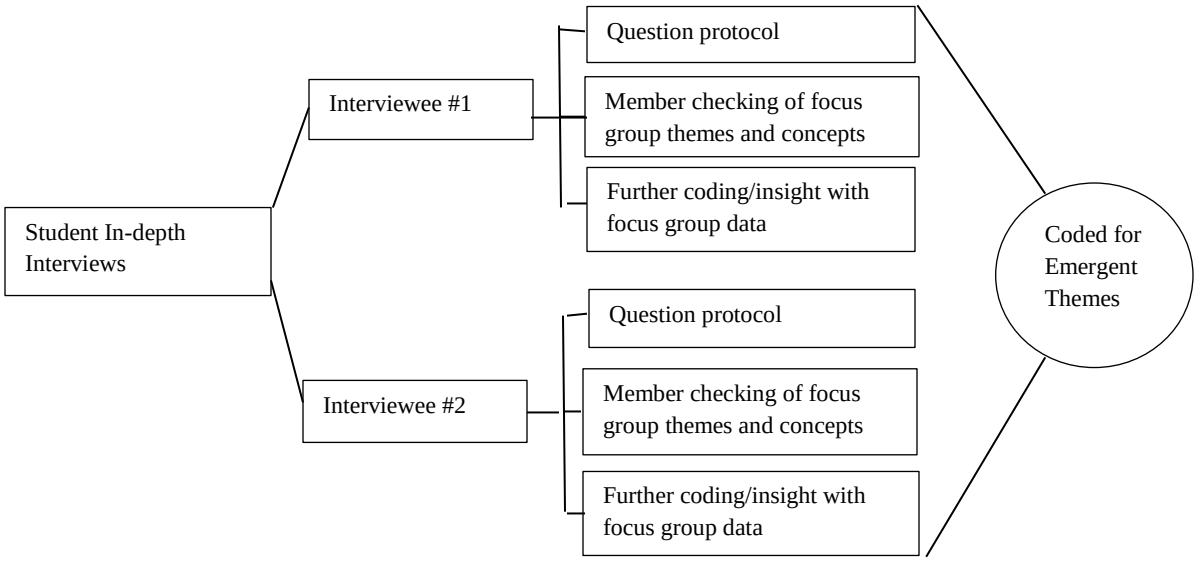

Figure 6: Student In-depth Interviews Data Collection

One-on-one interviews with students.

The one-on-one interview process allowed two students to give deeper insight into the program they had been part of for four years. Interviews are often used to determine how respondents perceive their situation, its meaning to them, what is especially significant about it to them, what might be significant to others, and how it came to be what it is (Krathwohl, 1998). The first part of the questioning process was open-ended questions about the mentoring program and their experience over their four years in multiple mentoring classrooms. The collection process consisted of tape-recorded interviews from face-to-face conversations. All information from the point of the students, about the mentoring program, was processed. The taped conversations were then sent to be typed by a third party court reporting service. The interviewed students then checked the typed transcripts for accuracy. The researcher coded and themed all

layers of the data together for emerging themes. The researcher also used two outside researchers for coding and comparison.

Data Analysis

The three data points of student surveys, focus groups, and interview transcripts were coded first looking for patterns. Coding is the process of finding patterns in meaning from emerging qualitative data sources (Mills, 2007). To begin to analyze data, the researcher looked to combine the emerging themes from the school-wide survey, leveled focus groups, and one on one interviews through the coding process. These patterns were then put into themes using the student own words.

The emergent data of the school-wide survey, leveled focus groups, and one on one interviews were compared and analyzed for patterns, themes, and discrepancies. The semi-structured questioning of the focus groups and one on one interviews allowed for better understanding of the culture as a whole. The data was allowed to emerge instead of being directed. The emerging themes from the school-wide surveys, focus groups, and one on one interviews were analyzed for overarching themes about the mentoring programs focus on social emotional learning and school success traits. The scaffold of themes and sub-themes provided a holistic picture of the mentoring program's effect from student perception in the school setting. The three data points assembled a picture of how the program manifests in the classroom for students.

As previously stated, the coded themes from the three data avenues were reviewed by two external reviewers. After input from the external reviewers, the final data analysis was documented, and the findings of the results were presented to draw meaningful conclusions. The analysis is presented in chapter four and framed within the literature review and PSEL standards

III and IV. The study conclusions were outlined in chapter five and used to enrich the mentoring program, highlight points to enlighten others looking into school mentoring based programs and offering suggestions for further research.

Verification

Verification was completed through multiple layers of data processing. The first is the use of a trained facilitator to conduct the focus groups. The outside trained facilitator established an open and free sharing environment for the elimination of any bias. The third data set was the trained qualitative interviewer conducting purposely selected twelfth grade student interviews. Member checking was an intricate part of the interview process by, checking with experienced students to gain an extended experience perception. The member checking happened through the use of typed transcripts. The researcher coded and themed the data using a simultaneous coding approach, with an emphasis on descriptive coding using the participants own language and pattern coding scanning for patterns in the data (Saldana, 2016). Lastly, the external review of the coding, emerging themes, and concepts through an external review utilizing two qualitative researchers was conducted.

Ethical Considerations

The practicing researcher employed ethical research principles throughout the qualitative study. The data in the form of student surveys, leveled focus group transcripts, and one on one interview transcripts were used with the approval of the chief executive operating officer. The interview instrument was designed and presented to the University of Michigan-Flint's board of reviewers through the appropriate IRB channels. The research data coding commence after the approval of the district CEO and the approval or exemption of the research project and interview instrument. The participation of the sampled participants in all data collection, including the

collection of the surveys and focus groups were voluntary and confidential. There are no names or identifying factors within all student data collection processes. The appropriate IRB letter is included in the appendices. The researcher practiced anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The focus group facilitator began each session with an explanation of the goal and process to each group allowing students to leave at any time within the interview process.

Chapter Summary

This methodology chapter explains how the research question was addressed during the course of the qualitative study research design. The chapter also provides a rationale for the use of the chosen qualitative techniques. The qualitative method was the best approach for a deep examination of the students' perceptions of the teacher to student mentoring program. The researcher was involved in the data analysis and theming of all relevant information. The use of student survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviewing triangulated and gave a picture of the program as a whole. The data collection and analysis was reviewed and completed by outside experts for theme review. This use of outside experts minimized bias in the review of data. This chapter also summarized research ethics implemented to make sure the protection of human participants was of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Research Purpose

The purpose of the research was to investigate students' perceptions of their involvement in a teacher to student mentoring program. As such, the study was intended to answer the question: Does mentoring matter? This chapter provides the findings of the qualitative study. The researcher provides a deep analysis of the students' points of view in regard to their mentoring experiences using several layers of qualitative data.

The Mentoring Program

The mentoring program entails instructing and modeling social emotional learning traits (SEL) as well as school success traits. The program objective is to bridge SEL learning gaps of low socio-economic students, special education students, students from trauma, and their general education counterparts who may not have trauma or low socio-economic backgrounds. The study site uses a mentoring program that consists of teachers fulfilling the role of mentors to students in the school setting thirty minutes a day. The mentors operate within an established mentoring curriculum and program schedule. In addition, the mentoring program is supported by the policies and procedures of the school regarding aspects such as attendance and discipline.

There are various circles of influence in the teacher to student mentoring program. The first circle is students participating in direct mentoring classroom instruction with teachers. The second circle of influence is teacher to student interaction characterized by specifically identified SEL and school success grade level curriculum themes. The third level of influence is the reinforcement of the SEL and school success traits within content classroom instruction. The fourth encompasses the school's policy and procedures as related to the mentoring program and

the final circle of influence is the parents and community who are considered in partnership with the school. This qualitative study focuses on the students'' direct learning and the interaction with mentors and the mentoring curriculum.

Data Collection Levels

Data was collected from a semi-rural high school in the Midwest. The site consists of 538 students in grades sixth through twelfth. There are 32 teachers participating in the mentoring program with the students. The site has a free and reduced lunch percentage of 75 percent. The location also has a 20 percent special education population. Qualitative methods were used in the collection of data through student input processes providing insight into previously presented program grade level learning themes, student to teacher interaction, and program structure. The qualitative methods enlisted provide an overview of the positive and negative perceptions of the mentoring program. All teachers and students participate in the mentoring process. Qualitative studies and techniques were key in identifying and collecting data necessary for gaining a deeper insight into student experiences in order to uncover crucial perceptions and patterns within the program. The research study is built on three levels of investigation moving from broad to more specific measures. The data sources were student surveys, focus groups, and purposefully selected interviews. The survey gave baseline data themes further investigated for deeper understanding and perception in the focus groups. The two one-on-one student interviews followed a purposeful selection criterion. The criterion was one male and one female interviewee each having participated for at least four years in the program. Thus ensuring the most interaction and time in the program while allowing for both male and female input. The interviewees elaborated on the information from the student survey and focus group data. They were also allowed to give other personal perceptions.

In the first qualitative data collection technique, a short online open-ended survey was completed by all sixth through twelfth grade students. After review of the survey, a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol was used with four student focus groups consisting of approximately eight to ten students within one grade of each other. The focus groups were conducted by an outside facilitator. The third qualitative data collection technique was the use of the two one-on-one interviews with outgoing senior level students. These students had the longest tenure in the mentoring program allowing a fuller perception of the program. The students' perception of the mentoring program is represented by the triangulation of data pictured in Figure 3.

The Big Picture and Overarching Perception

The key student perception of the mentoring program, derived from the student surveys, focus groups, and student interviews was the students' understanding and belief in the importance of the process and the possible positive outcomes of the program. The students expressed an understanding of how the mentoring program could increase their academic success. The students also expressed how a positive school climate and culture built on understanding others' viewpoints, benefits their experience in the school setting. The students voiced an understanding of how the mentoring program benefits the student body by allowing them to better interact in the school environment through skill development in the areas of social emotional learning and school success traits. In Figure 7 the overarching student perception is broken down into two themes: human relations and school success. The themes are further developed into supporting or sub-themes. One interconnected theme emerged from the data concerning implementation fidelity which impacts both emergent themes. Each sub-theme is examined through the three layers of data beginning with the broader survey, confirmed by the focus group and solidified by

an interview. Each sub-theme can be found within every layer of data. It is important to note the broader survey informed the questions used in the focus groups and the focus group informed the open-ended questions used in the individual interviews.

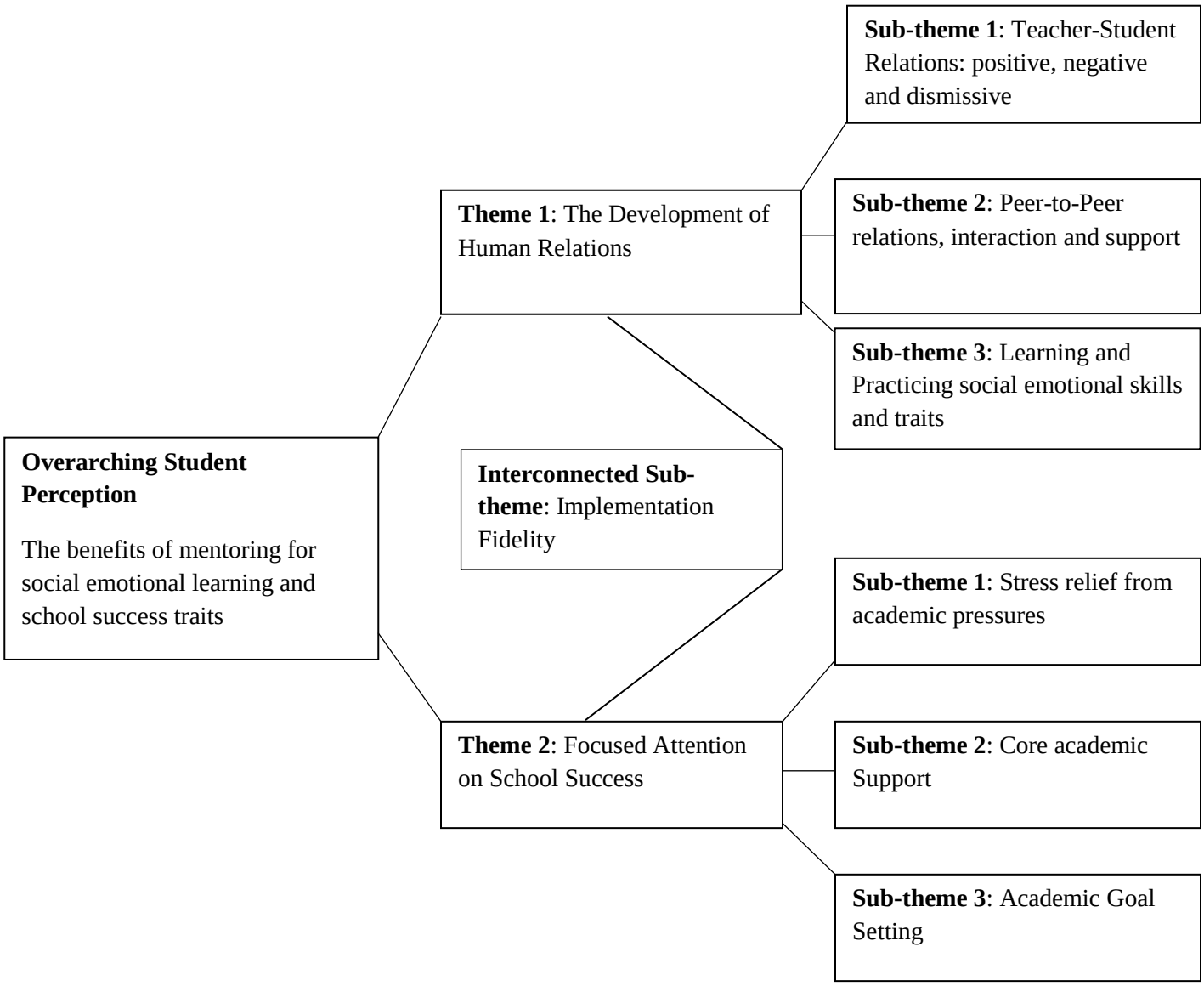

Figure 7: Student Perception Overall Themes and Sub-themes

Theme I: The Development of Human Relations

In the student survey, 99 of 402 comments referred to the need for positive relationships between teachers and students and students to each other. "I was attracted to having the capability of building relationships with teachers who are kind and enthusiastic to everyone," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The development of human relations first began emerging from the broader student survey. "The thing I like is all the interactions made in the class," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). Therefore in the study, the emerging definition of human relations was the interactions of students and teacher as mentors and students with other students. Students perceived a key theme of the mentoring program was to have positive outcomes in the area of relationships and to build a climate and culture in the school providing students a safe and secure learning environment.

In the student focus group forums, there were 29 comments out of 139 on the positives of relationship building. From the student interviews and focus groups, it was further recognized by students that in order to set up good human relations, team building was an important activity and skill. "I learned how to balance homework and social life, and how to meet and talk to new people," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). There was an intentional focus for student interaction in the mentoring program with the mentor and peers to increase knowledge of other points of view. "The process of team building opened my eyes to the lives of other classmates including the challenges they faced," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018).

In the one-on-one interviews, one student made reference to the need for positive teacher and student relationships. In the interview process Student A stated, "The time I spent developing good relationships is important since it provided an opportunity for me and my classmates to become closer (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." Therefore, as perceived by students, relationship building between teachers and students and students and students is an important focus of the mentoring program leading to the first overarching theme of human relations. In Figure 8 the baseline data collected shows the percentages of the three human relations themes that emerged from the students' voices within theme one. The three sub-themes are presented below in Figure 8.

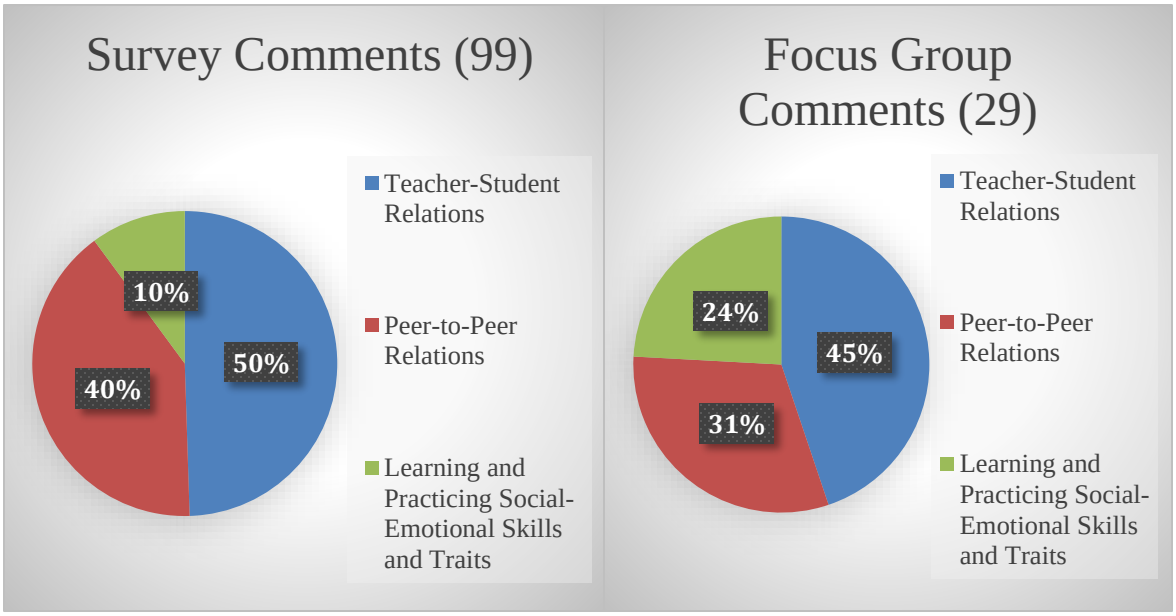

Table 1: Student Survey and Focus Group Data Related to Human Relations

Human Relation Sub-themes.

Three sub-themes emerged in the theme of development and success of human relations. These sub-themes are: 1) teacher-student relations, 2) peer-to-peer relations, and 3) learning and

practicing social emotional skills and traits. The sub-themes are presented with examples of student comments demonstrating the steps connecting each data source to the next.

Teacher-student relations.

There were 49 comments of the 99 in the category of human relations reflected in the student survey as related to teacher-student relations. “I like how the teacher and students are nice and respectful toward one another in the class,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). This was a positive attribute to the teacher to student relationship. The sub-theme was defined by students as the positive interactions between students and their teacher mentors. “I like the fact that Mr. Smith was always enthusiastic and kind to everyone,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The student survey data showed students wanted teachers who appreciated their school of thought and listened to their suggestions, ideas or opinions. A student stated, “I feel like focusing on relationships has helped me to see where my goals can take me,” in the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). This was a focused part of the interaction between the mentor and student for goal setting each week in the mentoring program. A student stated, “I like how my teacher goes over activities as a group which makes us bond,” in the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018).

In analyzing the next level of the qualitative data collection process, 13 of the 29 focus group comments about human relations focused on the teacher to student relationship. One of the students responded, “I like that my teacher wants to know what I think and listens,” from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). This focus carried over in the one-on-one interviews. In the interview process Student B stated, “I like that mentoring gave me

an opportunity to get to know a side of my teacher I wouldn't have seen in the classroom (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." Students strongly perceived, the focus of the mentoring program needs to remain on opening lines of communication between teachers and students.

Peer-to-peer relations.

In the student survey, 40 comments of the 99 in the area of human relations reflected that students enjoyed having the time to share ideas with fellow students. "I like that other students want to listen and know what I think about school and life," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The sub-theme was defined by students as positive and intentional interactions between student and student beginning in the mentoring program and expanding into the school's culture and climate. "I like that I get to see and talk with my friends that are not in my other classes," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The set curriculum of the mentoring program gave opportunities for these conversations to occur.

The focus group had nine of the 29 comments about human relations related to the impact of peer-to-peer interactions. One of the students stated, "I like the opportunity to talk with my friends about things that were affecting me that day," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The mentoring program was designed to adjust for teachable moments or issues important in the moment. In the one-on-one interview process Student A stated, "I think it's a good hour because most hours you really don't get to relate to the students in your class because you're doing homework or you're taking tests. It was a way to become closer with my peers (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." In the one-on-one

interview process Student B stated, “I think empowering each other and being understanding and compassionate to people because you don’t always know what other people are going through (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019).” Students perceived the importance of the mentoring program’s concentration on skills in conducting difficult conversations around issues arising from their day to day life. Student input from all three data sources emphasized student perception of the need for a mentoring program designed to offer opportunities for student to student understanding through intentional interaction.

Learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits.

In the student survey, ten comments of the 99 in the area of human relations reflected student enjoyment of learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits, with those opportunities to address social problems supervised in the school setting. “I like being able to focus on anti-bullying and talking with my friends about problems at school,” from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). This highlighted student awareness and appreciation of the mentor program’s provision of knowledge to assist them in acquiring social emotional skills advancing the quality of their social life and school experience. “I like talking about important issues and why mentoring is important,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). Through the data collection, the student definition of the sub-theme centered on the opportunity to learn and practice skills to better understand and work with each other. “I like that we get to discuss any issues we have going on,” from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The students expressed the importance of open discussion to alleviate tensions in the school setting.

The focus group data contained seven comments of the 29 related to human relations centered on social emotional learning. One of the students responded, “I would like to talk more about anti-bullying and how we can help one another cope with social media,” according to the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The students perceived the program’s intent to instill and focus social emotional skills to help them cope with identified societal pressures. Students understood one of the program’s key goals was to increase their productivity and effectiveness in addressing emotional roadblocks to learning. Students wanted the mentors to identify and create opportunities for practicing empathy and life skills. A student stated, “Mentoring has helped me to see other people’s opinions and be more open to their point of view,” from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The other consideration was the creation of a classroom culture and environment to ensure students feel safe and appreciated as they fulfill their weekly goals. In the one-on-one interview process Student B stated, “I think understanding what others are going through helped me figure out how to handle all the pressure I put on myself (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019).” The students perceived the positive aspects of promoting academic excellence through skill development in the mentoring program. The students perceived the importance of human relations as related to school success; therefore, the second theme to emerge from the student perception data was a focused attention on school success.

Theme II: Focused Attention on School Success

In the student survey, there were 104 comments out of 402 about the focused attention on school success. “I like being able to access the Chromebooks in order to look at my grades and complete assignments,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). “What I like about mentoring is when I have missing assignments my teacher

helps us if we need help," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The concentration on what makes good class success skills and traits were mentioned throughout the survey results. The students perceived the program's instruction based on improving grades and setting weekly goals as a crucial part of the mentoring program.

In the focus group data there were 42 positive comments out of 139 about the focus on school success. "I liked the opportunity to focus on grades and attendance checking each week to know where I am at," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). Students mentioned the success of the class was dependent on a stress-free environment. The mentoring program was a class period where a letter grade was not the focus during the course of the school day. Additionally, focus group comments reflected students were appreciative for the opportunity to catch up on homework as well being able to ask questions and get academic support. "I've had teachers who care a lot, that care translates into other academic classes," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The students expressed the benefits of a focused attention on class grades and weekly goal setting as a performance measure. The students perceived the program's culture of kindness as a way to share goals and gain peer support. The culture of kindness curriculum is initiated in the sixth grade and then built upon on each year. The program focus on creating the culture of kindness left students feeling more comfortable about sharing with teachers and each other.

The intentional focus on school success in the mentoring program was recognized by the students. The students expressed the importance of the teacher mentor allowing for open communication about academic progress. In the one-on-one interview process, Student B stated, "I like that my teacher made me feel that they were actually interested in my grades and they would say things like, hey you need to get this grade up and why are you missing so many days

(Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." These intentional actions by mentors led to the students' perception of school success and an understanding of the programming and the possible outcomes regarding their academic performance. In Figure 9 the baseline data collected from the survey and focus groups, demonstrates the breakdown and percentages of the three school success sub-themes emerging from the students' voice.

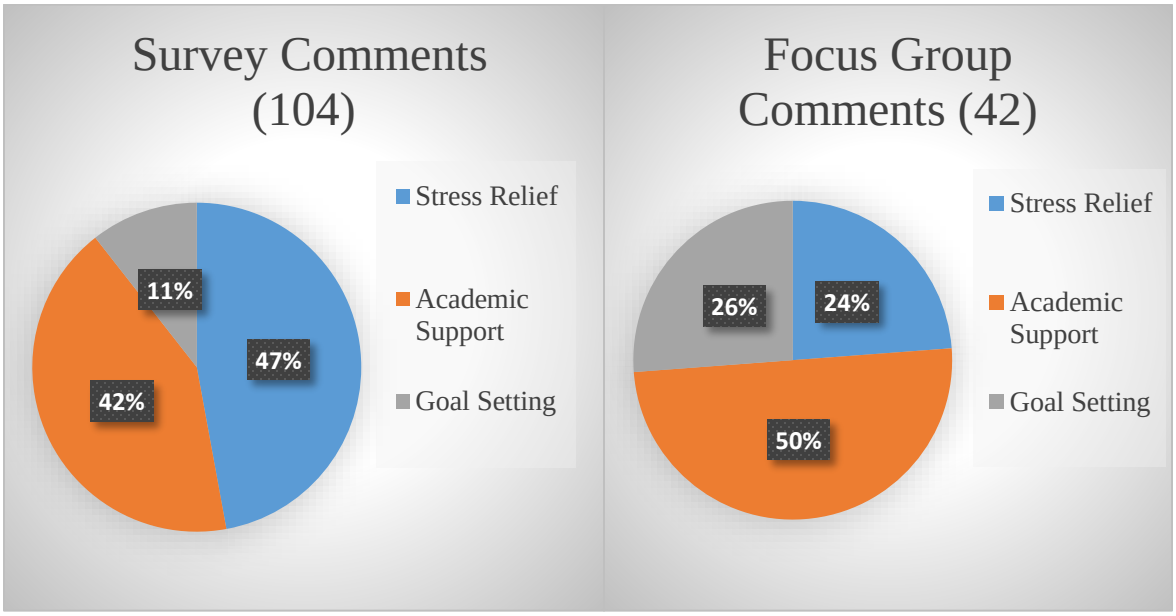

Table 2: Student Survey and Focus Group Data Related to School Success

School Success Sub-themes

Three school success sub-themes emerged within Theme 2, the focused attention on school success. Student data identified the sub-themes as: 1) stress relief, 2) academic support, and 3) goal setting.

Stress relief from academic pressures.

In the student survey, 49 comments out of 104 in the area of school success centered on the break in the day and the stress relief from academic pressure. "I like that it's more relaxed and

less stressful and it allows me to set goals," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). As the mentoring program was a daily 30 minute pass/fail class, the students commented within the three data collection points that an important part of the mentoring program was a break in the day and a place to de-stress from academic pressures. "I like that I get to spend more time with my friends," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The need to interact and catch up with friends was appreciated by the students. "It's fun and we learn a lot and do fun things," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The students expressed the importance of the break from normal academic classes in the school day. "I like that it is calm and a nice break," according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The focus group data contained ten comments of the 42 related to school success centered on a stress relief from academic pressures. One of the students responded, "I like that it gives me a break in the day to relax and just slow down," according to the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The one-on-one interviews also reflected the importance of time permitted in the mentoring program for stress relief. Through the interview process, Student A stated, "I like that there is no pressure for a grade and more time to slow down and think (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." The students recognized the intentional development of the program to not have a grade attached and have more of a focus on the building of relationships and content grades with mentors and peers.

Core academic support.

The student survey indicated 44 comments out of 104 in the area of school success centered on the time allocated for academic support. "I like that my teacher is able to answer questions in a one-on-one situation about things I am having trouble understanding," from the student survey

conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The theme of core academic support was defined by students as the opportunity to ask teachers or peers for help with academic assignments. "I like that we get to use Chromebooks to get caught up," from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The access to technology was appreciated by students who have limited access in the rural setting. "It's a very good class and it teaches you what to do when you are behind in a class," from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The students appreciated the mentors' ability to pay attention to their unique attributes and intentionally sought to improve individual learning skills and capabilities. A student stated, "I like how grade reports help us to keep track of what we're doing in classes," from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The students perceived the program allowed them to monitor grades and take corrective actions to improve student success.

The focus group data contained 21 comments of the 42 in the area of school success related to academic support. One of the students responded, "I like looking at my grade book and checking for missing assignments so that the teacher can help," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The program provided additional support in the case of missing assignments and when appropriate test prep. A student stated, "I liked the day for SAT prep. But, I would free up teachers so they all have mentoring at the end of the day and students can choose what they need help with," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). Through the one-on-one interview process, Student B stated, "I like that I was able to work with partners in order to figure out test questions during test prep (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." These insightful student statements reflect the

grade level specific needs and student concerns of high stakes standardized tests in the upper grades.

Academic goal setting.

In the student survey, 11 positive comments out of 104 were in the area of school success surrounding the time allocated for academic goal setting. “I like time to focus on my assignments and set goals for the week on Monday to get organized,” from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The last sub-theme identified under the theme of school success was academic goal setting. The students defined this sub-theme as setting weekly goals on Monday and reviewing the outcome of the goal with the mentor on Friday. “I like that we can finish homework in mentoring class,” from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). The student survey also had several negative student comments on academic goal setting. A student stated, “I do not like filling in the data binders for grades and attendance when I am a straight A student,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). In this instance, the student was not able to perceive the larger picture of the data binders as the basis for his/her career readiness portfolio.

The focus group data contained 11 comments out of the 42 in the area of school success as related to academic goal setting. A student stated, “The goals help students to prioritize their thoughts and time for the week,” from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The students’ perceived that time was given to them to become more organized and focused on academics. In the interview process Student B stated, “I liked setting goals each week and having a sense of achieving something each Friday (Student B, personal interview, March

21, 2019).” Students were given two days a week to focus on academic goal setting and achievement in the design of the mentoring program.

Implementation Fidelity: An Interconnected Sub-theme

During the one-on-one interview process, Student B stated, “Every year the experience was different because some teachers took it seriously and some just thought it was another thing they had to do (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019).” The students defined the mentoring program fidelity theme as the lack of buy in or program implementation by the mentor teacher. Referring back to Figure 7, the integrated theme of program implementation fidelity is perceived by the students as foundational to their positive experiences in the program. The student survey had 31 comments out of 402 related to implementation fidelity. A student stated, “Everyone in my class wasted time and didn’t participate in the conversations,” from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018).

The focus group data contained 24 comments out of 139 related to implementation fidelity. A student stated, “We need more communication from the teacher about the purpose and understanding of the program,” from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The students voiced frustration when the mentor teacher did not intentionally address social emotional learning traits. Students were aware mentors were charged with teaching skills and facilitating conversations to overcome and understand problems in the climate and culture of the school setting. The students were frustrated if skill building and conversations did not occur during their mentoring time.

In the interview process Student A stated, “Some of the teachers are really good about it and on top of their stuff and know exactly what to do each day. But, then there are some teachers that

kind of wing it and it becomes a free day (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019).” The students saw that a lack of mentor buy-in created less opportunity for student interaction due to the lack of purpose, direction, and intentional implementation. The program’s set parameters were known to the students and students were aware when components were lacking. Student A stated, “Administration needs to tell teachers there are five specific days and make sure that they do it all, not just the parts they want (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019).” Students perceived the importance of implementation fidelity as a foundational component and asking for administrative oversight reflects a desire for not only program fidelity but respect for their time and needs.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four represents the findings about the mentoring program as perceived by the student body in the first two layers of the mentoring program. The first theme identified within the qualitative study presented is the importance of developing relationships between teachers and students and students with students. The students expressed the value of a solid relationship between a teacher and student and, student to student. The development of positive relationships through building social emotional traits led to a climate of mutual respect in the school setting as illustrated in Figure 8. The students expressed the mentoring program generates positive opportunities to increase the understanding of the teacher as a mentor and the student as a mentee. Students further expressed an understanding of each student’s voice through social interaction and the increased positive effects on school climate and culture.

The students noted mentors were expected to build upon the teacher to student relationship in order to increase student school success traits. Several students articulated the need for effective

communication, respect, and recognition for all students in the program. The students voiced an understanding of the importance of focusing on school success within the scopes of academic support, stress management, and setting realistic and achievable goals as illustrated in Figure 9. Students within all three levels of data expressed the value in interacting with teachers and peers outside of the normal functions of the classroom.

The students addressed the negative attitudes of the mentors and students, which can compromise the success of the program. The students voiced the concern a lack of implementation by the teacher can lead to a negative experience for the student in the mentoring program. This underlying principle was a key finding as illustrated in its connections to both major themes in Figure 7. The students perceived the mentors picking and choosing of program curriculum as creating an inconsistent experience in the mentoring program. The lack of either teacher or student buy-in, consistency, or refusal to participate weakened both the relationship building and school success trait goals of the program. Students were clear, it was the mentor teacher who set the tone for the mentoring process and positive mentee experience.

The inclusion of human relations and school success traits in the mentoring program had an overall positive perception, through the lens of the students, as identified in Figure 7. The picture painted through student voice, showed positive student and teacher interaction in a traditionally scheduled school day. In student examples where the program was implemented with fidelity, the mentoring opportunity led to valued open lines of communication and interaction between teachers and students and students with students. The students recognized the mentoring program provided the opportunity to focus on building school success traits. Further reflection on the student voices and perspectives creates opportunities for insights into systematic mentor program development. The phenomenon of a teacher and student based

mentoring program, as perceived by the students in the program, involves an intentional focus on positive human relations and school success traits based on a commitment to program fidelity.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the students' perceptions of their experiences in a teacher to student mentoring program. The study sought to answer the question, "What are students' perceptions of the school-based teacher to student mentoring program?" As referenced in more detail in previous chapters, the mentoring program's goal was to teach students in a low socio-economic rural setting social emotional learning and school success traits. This chapter presents the researchers' conclusions based on the study's major findings. Also included is a discussion on the connections and themes within the study and how these findings may inform other school-based mentoring programs. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas of future suggested research and a brief summary.

Research Findings and Connections to Educational Theories of Mentoring

Humanistic educational approaches seek to engage the whole person including not only the students' intellect but emotions, social capacities, artistic and practical life skills. The students' perceptions of the mentoring program aligned to humanistic educational philosophy because it included the element of teachers caring about what students thought and how they felt as a critical educational element. In this study, students expressed the perception that better communication and positive school culture had improved since the beginning of the mentoring experience. Reflecting back on the philosophical foundation for the mentoring program, mentoring as an educational topic can be seen as a component or application of the humanistic philosophy of education. Humanism is about fostering each student to his or her fullest

potential. Humanistic education (also called person-centered or student-centered education) is an approach to education based on the work of humanistic psychologists, particularly the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Ozmon, 2008). The students thought the program's emphasis on teacher to student relationships, and improved student to student relationships created a safer and more comfortable environment to express their ideas and concerns within the school setting. The installation of time to work on social emotional skills and school success traits opened the door for open communication.

Researcher Reflection on Findings

The students' overall understanding and perceptions of the mentoring program were insightful and painted a broad picture of the mentoring program. The students openly shared their mentoring program perceptions regarding the development of both social emotional learning and school success traits, as well as, an understanding of the importance of teacher sincerity as a prerequisite to good mentoring relationships. In Figure 7 the themes and sub-themes illustrate the connection of student perceptions within the studied mentor program. The students demonstrated a perceived understanding of the mentoring program's structure and the importance of the program being implemented consistently for all students involved. In the sub-theme on implementation fidelity, the students voiced the importance of the program being faithfully delivered by teacher mentors thus ensuring consistent benefits to all students. The students recognized, within the important area of program fidelity, in order to benefit all students, it was critical to have teacher buy-in to the mentoring program's purpose and goals. Students knew which teachers were sincere and which were not as demonstrated in comments regarding positive or negative mentoring experiences. Students expressed how a positive mentoring experience depended on the teacher mentor you were assigned to for the school year.

Students linked teacher attitudes toward the mentoring program as necessary for the majority of students to have a successful mentoring experience. The researcher was surprised at the openness and honesty of the students in the one on one and focus group interactions regarding teacher motivation of compliance versus sincerity. These perceptions helped to evoke an image of the mentoring program on a daily basis and how it can be beneficial for all involved; however, total buy-in by teachers was key.

The students in the study expressed perceptions that indicated the development of human relations was worthwhile. The students asserted positive relationships can help them be more engaged in the school setting both through teacher to student and peer-to-peer relationships. The students perceived not only was a positive teacher to student relationship important to their educational success; but also, peer-to-peer relationships were important for their understanding of other students' viewpoints. The student perception data indicated students were aware that practicing social emotional skills would yield positive results in their daily school interactions. The students believed positive teacher and peer relationships would secure support in the educational setting. Positive and conducive relationships between the mentors and their students brought about a sense of belonging and thus provided encouragement to the students for their participation and cooperation in the program. In addition, the researcher was able to better understand students' perceived need to interact with teachers on a more personal level. In other words, teacher to student relationships were highly regarded by students as important. This positive impact on student perception about the objectives of the mentoring program helped students realize the need for participation and interaction in the program. The students expressed learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits helped them to be at ease and handle the pressures of the educational process. Through a clearly communicated and intentionally

addressed understanding coupled with buy-in of program goals by all stakeholders, students were better able to perceive mentoring as a positive experience.

The students' perceptions about the school success theme were was based on the importance of the program's intentional and focused attention to the acquiescence of school success traits. The students expressed appreciation, and it was beneficial to them, for teachers to offer core academic support. Students voiced setting academic goals each week allowed them time to plan as part of their educational process. Goal setting was enhanced in the process through adequate guidance, reflection, and advice. In addition to the students' understanding of goal setting and follow-up on academic success, students also voiced the program offered them scheduled time during their day to decompress thus helping to relieve stress from academic and other pressures from the day. Teacher to student mentoring programs would benefit from having student feedback as part of the program design so as to help maintain program effectiveness.

The students believed for a positive relationship between the teacher and student there needs to be a solid structure. This was important to the success of the program, as well as the participation and productivity of the students, in fact, the absence of a structure was part of the interconnected sub-theme, implementation fidelity. The mentors were expected to have precise and clearly communicated expectations. The rules and regulations were to be sensible enough and constantly enforced in a manner solidifying the trust and understanding of the students about teacher expectations and interests. Students communicated a key component of the program was for the teacher as a mentor to use moments of instruction to build relationships of trust. The trust factor involved both teacher to student interaction and student to student interaction in a safe environment. A good teacher to student relationship needed to be one of respect. Thus prompted the students to show the same level of respect to the mentors. The reciprocal relationship was

foundational for students to realize the set goals and objectives of the program. The creation of a trusting, safe and secure environment for the students limited instances of intimidation, bullying, and nonproductive criticism opening the environment for better learning and positive interactions.

Research Findings and Connection to Literature

The student perceptions of the teacher to student mentoring program revealed several important themes supporting the literature on mentoring. In this study, two main themes emerged centered on human relations and student success. Examining the deeper sub-themes within each of these themes, adds to the depth of understanding on the subject of mentoring. Two major themes were identified – development of human relations and focused attention on school success. Three sub-themes emerged in relation to human relations that centered on teacher-student relations, peer-to-peer relations, and learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits. Three sub-themes also emerged in relation to school success that focused on stress relief from academic pressures, core academic support, and academic goal setting. There was also an interconnected sub-theme on implementation fidelity.

Human relations.

Under the human relations theme, the first human relation sub-theme was based on strong teacher to student relationships. These student perceptions support several areas of current literature on mentoring. “I like how the teacher and students are nice and respectful toward one another in the class,” according to the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018). This study aligns the work of Dubois (2002), Harvey (1985), Postlethwaite and Hylan (1998) through students’ voicing the importance of a positive school climate and culture within

their academic setting in order to be successful. In the interview process Student B stated, "I like that mentoring gave me an opportunity to get to know a side of my teacher I wouldn't have seen in the classroom (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." The example from the study reinforces the work of Anda (2001), Fruiht (2013), Jensen (2017), and Dubois (2014) through students expressing their view on the importance of the teacher to student relationship.

The second human relations sub-theme of human relations was based on student perspectives into peer-to-peer relations, interaction, and support. Student perceptions supported several areas of current literature on mentoring. One of the students stated, "I like the opportunity to talk with my friends about things that were affecting me that day," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). This research upholds the work of Moses-Snipes (2005) and Tierney et al., (2000) by giving student voice to the importance of understanding and accepting differing views based on the background of the individual. In the one-on-one interview process Student A stated, "I think it's a good hour because most hours you really don't get to relate to the students in your class because you're doing homework or you're taking tests. It was a way to become closer with my peers (Student A, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." These student examples also complement the work of Payne (2005), Baker (2005), and Cavell (2005) through students expressing the importance of understanding other students' views, especially from differing backgrounds.

The third human relations sub-theme was based on learning and practicing social emotional skills and traits. The perceptions of the theme can support several other areas of current mentoring literature. A student stated, "Mentoring has helped me to see other people's opinions and be more open to their point of view," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). This study complements the work of Coyne (2015), Archard

(2012), Keogh (2006), Dobson (1988), Ellis (1996), Bachman (1996), and Prout (1999) through students perceiving the need to work on their own social emotional learning in the school setting. Student B stated, "I think understanding what others are going through helped me figure out how to handle all the pressure I put on myself (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)." This provides an example of students being able to reflect on their own mental health needs or actions impacting both successful peer and teacher relationships in the school setting.

School success.

The first school success sub-theme of school success was based on student perceptions the mentoring program which offered an opportunity for student stress relief from academic pressures. These student perceptions support several areas of current literature on mentoring. One of the students responded, "I like that it gives me a break in the day to relax and just slow down," according to the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). This study's research reinforces the work of Durlak (2011), Kelly (2014), Shaull (2004), Stockard (1992), and Morrow (1995) through expressing the impact of the teacher to student relationships when students perceive being given opportunity to relax, de-stress and feel safe in the school environment.

The second school success sub-theme of school success was based on the program's offering of core academic support. The sub-theme's student perceptions support several areas of current literature on mentoring. One of the students responded, "I like looking at my grade book and checking for missing assignments so that the teacher can help," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The core academic support identified within the study links to the work of Hattie (2018), Dubois (2014), Fruiht and Wray-Lake (2013) through connecting student perspective on the teacher relationship in regards to educational

attainment. Students expressed knowing the teacher on a deeper level allowed them to obtain academic support by freely asking questions.

The third school success sub-theme was based on the mentoring program component for the development and creation of opportunities for weekly academic goal setting. The perceptions within the sub-theme support several areas of current literature on mentoring. A student stated, "The goals help students to prioritize their thoughts and time for the week," from the focus group conducted by R. A. Martin (Mentoring, May, 2018). The study's findings complement the work of Hansen (2007), Rhodes (2002 and 2006), Anderson (2004), Herrera (2004) and Cornelius-White (2007) in the important area of and need for goal setting and planning for the future. "I like time to focus on my assignments and set goals for the week on Monday to get organized," from the student survey conducted by J. J. Kiss (Mentoring, April, 2018) adding to the work of Caldarella et al. (2009), Cannata (2005), Aspy (1977) and Rogers (1969) through the student perceptions of the importance of goal setting for increased self-esteem and the need of guidance in that process.

Implementation fidelity.

The interconnected sub-theme emerging from the study was implementation fidelity. The students perceived the mentor as being the catalyst for success of failure of the mentoring experience. The perceptions of the fidelity theme supports several areas of current literature on mentoring. During the one-on-one interview process, Student B stated, "Every year the experience was different because some teachers took it seriously and some just thought it was another thing they had to do (Student B, personal interview, March 21, 2019)" thus supporting the work of Rolfe (2008), McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) in regards to student perspectives of implementation fidelity within program design. The design of a mentoring

program and the lack of follow through of that design can have a negative impact on the mentee. Students perceived that the lack of implementation fidelity can decrease the mentoring experience.

Research Validity and Limitations

While the researcher still agrees qualitative research was the right choice for this perception study, qualitative research tools, like interviews and surveys, are not designed to capture statistical significance or direct correlations. The purpose of the study is to find the emerging themes between a teacher to student mentoring program and the perceptions of the participating students in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics, culture, needs, and interactions of the program recipients within the culture and environment of the setting. The limitations of the study were also the strength of the study. The study brings to light students' broad understanding, perceptions and the culture within the studied phenomenon. In the future, using quantitative tools to make direct correlations between student participation in the mentoring program and grades, attendance and graduation rates, discipline referrals, etc., could provide another layer of research and strengthen the evidence base. Further suggested studies will be addressed under the further research section.

A second limitation of a qualitative lens is the study was centered within an identified phenomenon thus analysis and findings cannot be generalized to a wider population. The research is localized and the data is attributed to the student population being studied within the specific research site. However, such insights may inform others in similar programs, with evaluating student characteristics, the setting, and goals. In addition, the study adds to the body of literature on mentoring.

Plans of Action in the School Setting

When advocating for change in any school system, the school must foster the social emotional and academic sides of the students as indicated in the themes of the development of human relations and focused attention on school success. The school must recognize student needs and challenges. Additional investment of resources and time to aid the mentors in emphasizing the importance of social emotional learning and school success traits is necessary. Mentors must have the proper training and understanding of the programming. Professional development on the skills and practices surrounding the identified study themes of relationships and school success should be addressed before launching a program and periodically thereafter. In the end, evaluation on implementation and follow through by mentors is important to the success of the mentoring program. Additionally, the district should take time to celebrate the positive perception of the student body to this programming with all stakeholders.

District studied.

Several recommendations for a course of action can be derived from this qualitative study. The first, explained above is mentor professional development. Schools may utilize a resource center for teachers to obtain information and collaborate regarding mentoring students and program goals. The center, whether online or physical, could contain curriculum maps and activities for the mentoring process and goals. These maps should be reviewed so all students in the program are receiving the same intentionally planned experience.

Second, in regards to the theme of program fidelity, the school district may consider creating an implementation handbook for new teachers so as to address the continuation of program fidelity. The handbook will also give current staff time to reflect on their own

implementation practices. New teachers may be paired within a grade level mentoring team consisting of veteran mentor teachers. Veteran teachers will be able to inform new teachers on how the mentoring process unfolds. The implementation handbook needs to be a living document updated with best practices and shared with all stakeholders in the school district. The integration of new and struggling mentors within a grade level mentoring team will help assure the fidelity of the program. Both these actions will help to reassure the mentoring program will continue to be an important aspect of the school's culture, climate, and student academic achievement.

As a third aspect of program fidelity, the mentoring program needs to have a system in place for monitoring and self-correction. There needs to be observations and oversight by the school administration or mentoring committee for feedback and program evaluation. The school needs to make opportunities for feedback from all stakeholders including parents and graduates through surveys and communication outreach. The students in this qualitative study acknowledged that at times they had a better or worse experience than their peers due to intentional mentor implementation of the program. The interested school would benefit from a scheduled time for grade level reflection and course correction by the teacher mentors.

The collected information can help to better understand the needs of the students and what is successful or lacking in the mentoring program. Positive and supportive oversight will set the parameters for better system fidelity.

Schools wanting to introduce or improve a teacher-student mentoring program.

Schools wanting to implement a teacher to student mentoring program must have a clear vision for the program. Teachers must have a firm understanding of what they are trying to achieve. Taking time to put together a system and plan to layout the mentoring program to better support the mentoring processes can have a positive impact by involving all stakeholders.

The students in this study had a firm understanding of the goals of the mentoring program. Their positive perceptions of the program went down when teachers did not follow through with program implementation. The collective buy-in from all stakeholders is key to implementing the program with fidelity. From this study, students understood the program and knew if their teacher was implementing the program to the best of their ability. There was also accountability and reflection during the course of the program in order to course-correct and resolve any arising issues. The study clearly expressed, according to student perceptions, the teacher to student relationship was vital in the creation of a safe and positive school culture and the success of the program goals.

Suggestions for Further Research

In Figure 1 of the Student Centered Mentoring Program, the third through fifth layers were not addressed in this research study. These layers go beyond the student and mentoring program layers to include the classroom, the school, and the parents/community. Future research may be designed to specifically look into these aspects of a mentoring program. For example, what is, if any, the relationship between the mentoring program and classroom success? Does a mentoring program enhance effective teaching and learning? The mentoring program could also be analyzed for increased student achievement in the classroom such as grading and exam data.

Looking deeper into school success traits, did the mentoring program affect behavior referrals and attendance data? Does the mentoring program create a culture that decreases student dropout rates? How is the mentoring program viewed and supported by the administration? In the final and last ring, a researcher may examine parent understanding of program goals. What might parents like to see included in the program, what are their suggestions, etc. Including parent perspectives may close the gap between parent and student wants and needs within the program. The parent perspective may also help to communicate program importance and may be beneficial to student buy-in. In the area of community, what is the mentoring program's impact on community perception of the school, its policies and procedures, and the communities' connection to the program? What might the community contribute to the mentoring process? These research topics may provide other lenses from the ring of stakeholders to add important data for the site to consider. Such data may begin to fill in figure 1 with more understanding from the outer rings of influence.

Another research angle may be looking into the demographics of the site population. The mentoring program may be analyzed according to age, gender or socio-economic status. Studying the mentoring program according to age groups may give insight into the best practices for program curriculum and implementation. Lastly, a research study may look into the issues of sustainability for the program or its spillover into classroom teaching practices and strategies.

General Reflection for the Field

This qualitative study sought to answer the question of what the students' perceptions are of a mentoring program based on social emotional learning and school success traits. The students perceived the program as being positive and beneficial to their success in the school

setting. The interactions between the teacher as a mentor and the student as a mentee allowed for free communication in the educational setting. The non-academic communication between teachers and students enabled the students to view their teachers as caring adults providing support in a more comprehensive and holistic manner in regards to multiple aspects of the students' lives. Through caring adults, students articulated a more positive attitude towards school. The students perceived the teacher mentors as caring about both their academic achievement (school success traits) and them as an individual (the development of positive relationships).

Students expressed the need to interact socially with peers in a setting that allowed them to experience different points of view. Students perceived community building, as a part of the mentoring program, as helping them to build skills and to trust peers. The students reflected about the effects of not making assumptions about other peers and to lean on each other for help. The teacher facilitation of program components helped students to view the teacher as a person who cared about how students treated each other. The human relationship building aspect of the program, as shared by students, helped to create a larger environment of caring and understanding in the school.

Students noted a break in the school day from traditional curriculum had a perceived positive impact on their focus. Student opinion reinforced the mentoring program's purposeful scheduled placement in the middle of the school day. This scheduled midday slot helped to create an intentional brain break for students. Learning the skills of goal setting, academic and non-academic, helped students to stay focused on the future instead of getting caught up in the issues of the day. The ability to set goals and monitor those goals on a weekly basis helped to focus their attention on school success.

The mentoring program had a positive perception in the eyes of the students when implemented with fidelity. Students understood following the mentoring program as it was designed may have been difficult in the beginning; however, became easier with time and consistency. Students noticed which teacher mentors did not follow the program with fidelity and who were unable to create the type of relationships developed between students and mentors who did faithfully follow the program. Students shared an appreciation for teacher mentors who took the time to build a positive relationship between each student and among the mentoring group. Some students clearly shared having adverse feelings toward mentors who did not follow the program with fidelity and seemed not to care about building human relations with them and others. Mentors who were genuine were easy for students to spot as were those mentors who were only going through the motions.

One important take-away for the researcher was the well-articulated insights and honest sharing I received from all students at the study site. Student mentees in grades six through twelve were not afraid to share a need for positive and trusted adult relations. They were open to building relationships with teacher mentors. The data collected during the study helped the researcher realize at the core of the mentoring program, human relationships were foundational to students achieving greater personal and school success and theses program goals were secured through teacher buy-in and program fidelity. Through the mentoring process students perceived that they could acquire and successfully manage school success and social emotional skills. Participating in this program and building relationships with teachers led students to believe that they were better able to acquire theses skills.

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APPENDIX A

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Protocol for Focus Groups and Interviews

1. Begin with facilitator providing introductory comments: Welcome and thank everyone for participating.

2. Introduction of facilitator and the note taker. Give a very brief overview of the project and goals for the focus group or interview. For example, "We are talking to you to find out about the mentoring program. We would like to find out what works and what does not work.

3. Give participants information about the process, times and breaks. "The process will be about one hour in length with the facilitator asking questions about your experience in the mentoring program." "If you need a break please feel free to excuse yourself to the restroom or facilities."

4. Distribute name tags for the focus group.

5. Provide basic guidelines for the focus group behavior and participation. "Please remember to be respectful of others time. Allow others to comment and do not cut anyone off."

6. Read the following statement: If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or to pass on any question. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary. The meeting is not a counseling session or support group. Someone will be available after the meeting if you need support. Keep personal stories "in the room"; do not share the identity of the attendees or what anybody else said outside of the meeting. There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's ideas will be respected. Do not comment on or make judgments about what someone else says, and do not offer advice. One person talks at a time. Everyone has the right to talk. The facilitator may ask someone who is talking a lot to step back and give others a chance to talk and may ask a person who isn't talking if he or she has anything to share. Everybody has the right to pass on a question.

7. Let people know that project staff will be taking notes about what is discussed, for use by the mentoring committee at Mountain Schools and administration for program improvement. Voice recordings will not be used to enhance confidentiality. Individual names or identifying information will not be attached to comments. This information will be archived for future use.

8. Ask questions developed for the study.

9. Let people know when you are going to ask the last question. This cues participants to share relevant information that may not have come up in answer to your key questions. For example, "Is there anything else you want to share that we haven't talked about yet?"

10. Thank all for participating.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group and Interview Questions

What went well in your mentoring program? What did you like?

What do you think could improve the mentoring program?

Where did you feel the program fell short for you or your classmates?

Student nonverbal:

APPENDIX C

Student Survey

What I liked about mentoring class? 1 sentence or more.

What I did not like about mentoring class? 1 sentence or more.

APPENDIX D

Interview Consent Form (Um Flint IRB ID # HUM00159521)

Dear Interview Participant,

I am conducting a study to understand students' perception of their school based teacher mentoring program. The study will consist of student surveys, five focus groups, and two interviews. Each interview will include an explanation of the study, and questions surrounding essential factors and key roles in how student perceive a school based mentoring system. The activity should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. For the purposes of my study I would like to use your verbal responses as data for my dissertation. I also hope to publish an article on the results of this study. The study will also provide me an opportunity to reflect on my own views, knowledge and experience.

The interview protocol activity will be audio-recorded. The tapes will be erased by December 31, 2019. Individual results of this activity will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form. Pseudonyms will be used in any reports of this study and neither the school district nor the individual participants will be identified.

I anticipate this study will benefit your fellow students, as learning about the mentoring program will enhance its effectiveness. Hopefully, this study will have long-term benefits for the profession by providing knowledge about important components and roles of educators in providing a teacher to student mentoring program.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Because this is an interview your discussion is only being communicated with the interviewer. The principle investigator in the study will only see the interview transcript without your name. However in order to enhance confidentiality for any students or teachers that may be mentioned during the interview, it is important you understand, as a interview participant, you will be agreeing not to discuss identity and content with any person outside of the interview. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting me at 989-737-4997 or jakiss@umflint.edu. Any further questions about the research now or during the course of the project will be answered by me, the researcher, or my advisor Dr. Pamela Ross at 810-762-3300 or rosspam@umflint.edu. For questions regarding the rights of human subjects in research, you may contact the University of Michigan-Flint Institutional Review Board Chair at 810-762-3300.

Thank you for your participation.

Jason J. Kiss

I hereby consent to participate in the study: Does Mentoring Matter? - A Qualitative Case Study of Student Perceptions and allow the use of my responses for the study data.

03-18-2019

Please Print Your Name Signature Date

APPENDIX E

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
eResearch.umich.edu
Flint Institutional Review Board • 4204 William S. White Building, Flint Michigan 48502-1950 • phone (810) 762-3383 • fax (810) 766-6791 • research@umflint.edu

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00159521]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
Title: Mentoring
Full Study Title (if applicable): Does Mentoring Matter? A Qualitative Case Study of Student Perceptions
Study eResearch ID: HUM00159521
Date of this Notification from IRB: 3/4/2019
Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 3/4/2019
UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)
OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000248

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:
The IRB Flint has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION 2(i) and/or 2(ii) at 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **if at least one of the following criteria is met**:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that **the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained**, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the **human subjects' responses** outside the research **would not reasonably place the subjects at risk** of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:
You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:
Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

Kazuko Hiramatsu

APPENDIX F

Date: 2/19/19

Address:

Dear superintendent:

As you may be aware, I am working on my doctor degree at the University of Michigan-Flint and am interested in using the XXXXXXX school as part of a qualitative phenomenological study. The study will focus on the phenomenon of the teacher-to-student mentoring program at the XXXXXX 6 - 12 building.

In order to complete this dissertation using data from mentoring program, I need your approval as superintendent and Chief Operating Officer to use both archival and current data for the years 2017 through 2019.

- survey data on the mentoring program.
- Focus Group transcripts on the mentoring program.
- Two one on one interviews with current 12th grade students.

Ant Data will only be used for the purpose of research for my dissertation. The district will not be named or identified and as much as possible the identity of the school will not be disclosed. Individual consent forms will also be used for any adult students involved in the study. I would greatly appreciate your interest in forwarding educational research by the participation of the district in my dissertation. If you have any questions regarding this please you may contact Jason Kiss at XXX – XXX – XXXX or my committee chairperson Dr. Pamela Ross-McClain XXX – XXX- XXXX.

Sincerely,

Jason J. Kiss

As the School Superintendent and Chief Operating Officer at XXXXXXX Schools, I approve the above-listed data for the use in Jason kiss's dissertation research at the University of Michigan-Flint.

Superintendent: Date: 2/19/19