



## The DC Tutoring and Mentoring Initiative

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The idea is simple: Provide a tutor or mentor for every student reading below grade level or in need of extra academic or non-academic support in the District of Columbia. Add in extra classroom and after-school support and we could transform education in the city; develop our workforce; reduce crippling downstream social costs and put the brakes on persistent poverty.

A tutor or mentor for every kid in need is a simple target that people can organize around. We have a community-wide problem that requires a community-wide response: Judged by standardized test scores, at least half of the 80,000 students in the District need more academic support. And even more could benefit from non-academic support, a coach, mentor or support provider for other family members.

Tutoring and mentoring have been proven to work. As Lisbeth Schorr put it more than thirty years ago in *Within Our Reach*, "intensive, comprehensive, individualized services with aggressive attention to outreach and to maintaining relationships over time... are what works..." for helping at-risk families and children. And there's research evidence that mentoring and tutoring as well as extra classroom and after-school support are effective.<sup>i</sup>

Every public school in the District lists community partners. However, the number of students in need of extra help far exceeds the resources of current partners— especially in low income neighborhoods and in middle and high school. So how do we begin to bridge the gulf between the current capacity and the need? We start with some building blocks already in place—the many organizations and schools doing good work in early childhood education, workforce development and college readiness as well as those providing extra support for families. These groups need more and better support, something no one disputes.

One approach involves major infusions of funding to hire more staff, whether in-school or as part of wrap-around services provided by community organizations or schools, but this strategy has been tried around the country and consistently falls short of meeting the need.<sup>ii</sup> Depending on how one weighs the evidence, charter schools *may* be part of the solution—but they are no panacea, either.<sup>iii</sup>

A sustainable approach needs a stronger foundation, one rooted in a commitment by all of us to take more responsibility for the community as a whole and action to back it up. Done well, the benefits of tutoring and mentoring extend far beyond academic improvement for the students: Tutor/mentors develop new capacities and confidence in their ability to be a positive force in their communities. They also become informal ambassadors throughout the city and suburbs advocating and educating on the transformative power of one-on-one relationships across class boundaries. Such relationships have the power to change public narratives from, "There's a problem in someone else's neighborhood and we can't do anything about it" to "By helping one kid in need, I'm building bridges and good will in our city. I'm changing lives for the better— even if it takes time and perseverance."

The numbers work: Nearly 30 percent of DC residents over the age of 16 volunteer in some capacity already, although it may be only for a few hours once or twice a year. That's nearly 170,000 people. We can estimate from national Census data that more than one in five are already working as tutors or mentors (17%) or as coaches, referees or managers for sports teams (5%). Even if we exclude the sports category, we still may have nearly 29,000 volunteers for youth already in place. That however, still leaves a large gap.

What does this gap look like on the ground? Ask the DC man who has made his life's work helping kids escape the cycle of gang violence<sup>iv</sup> describing a group of young men that he was talking to in a classroom one summer day. They all wanted to go back out into the sweltering heat, anything to avoid the exercise he asked them to do on a classroom chalkboard because they didn't want their peers to know that they couldn't read or write. Or ask the master 10th grade English teacher at a highly regarded charter school who works 70 hours a week and could still put 30 volunteers to work in her classes to help work one-on-one with the many kids that are struggling to keep up.

Imagine if just one in ten of the District's 80,000 college students agree to serve as a tutor for one day a week. Add another one in twenty from the 70,000 suburban college students and 1 in 10 of the 37,000 seniors aged 65-74, and we are now up to 15,000 tutor/mentors. Add people with flexible work schedules (or employers willing to give them some flexibility) and the numbers skyrocket. Mobilize local religious congregations, civic clubs and veterans' organizations.

In short, this is doable.

**DCTMI's ROLE: SUPPORT THE EXISTING NETWORK OF ORGANIZATIONS.** We have identified approximately eighty organizations that currently provide tutoring or mentoring for students. Some like Reading Partners serve hundreds of students on site at schools and use a national evidence-based model. Others are volunteer run and serve less than 30 students. We believe it's important to serve the full range of organizations to both help them expand the number of students they can serve and to help them build their capacity to provide successful tutoring and mentoring programs and to measure their results. After talking with dozens of these organizations, our impression is that there's good work being done at virtually all of them, but many need more support.

Besides recruiting volunteers for them, we expect to be able to help many of them by offering low-cost access to the online Mentoring Orientation series developed by the Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring, low-cost use of the volunteer management application developed by CiviCore, support for implementing performance and outcome measurement tools developed by the Urban Institute, and access to volunteers with experience in grantwriting, fundraising and possibly volunteer management. There may also be opportunities for collective volunteer recruitment and fundraising among the participating tutoring and mentoring organizations as well as collaboration on transportation of students and adults, an issue that remains a substantial hurdle for a number of organizations working in Southeast.

After a couple of years of helping them build their capacity, we hope to see high quality and comparable data become the norm among the tutoring and mentoring organizations so that the community of organizations and stakeholders can better understand what practices are working for what populations and subpopulations and what needs improvement.

**OUTREACH.** We propose a broad-based and multifaceted grassroots outreach effort to recruit tutor/mentors. Typical collective impact projects, in contrast, have focused on securing funding from government and private funders for data-driven coordination of efforts between schools and community organizations as the means to increase the level of services. These and other top-down initiatives and

programs may include efforts to recruit more college student or community volunteers but tend to fall well short of producing the numbers needed, as the distressing statistics on state and large urban area school systems show.<sup>v</sup>

Much like the impact of tutoring and mentoring activities themselves, the most effective outreach campaign is not necessarily quick and easy. We propose instead combining traditional “quick and easy” marketing and outreach approaches with a door-to-door canvassing strategy that has proven effective across a wide range of efforts: from the best political campaigns to the dangerous voter registration work of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer to recent public health initiatives.

We have already used this approach with success in a diverse neighborhood in the District during both summer evenings and Saturday mornings using a coalition of nonprofit organizations' staff and volunteers. Using a simple 1-page questionnaire, canvassers engaged community members in a conversation about their perspectives on the community, their personal or family needs, and in their interest in getting involved in neighborhood activities or in volunteering as a tutor or mentor or with other nonprofit organizations. We found that 80-90% of people would open their doors and an equally large percentage would offer some help and give us their emails.<sup>vi</sup>

There are probably no shortcuts to changing a culture. As Atul Gawande, a Harvard physician wrote in the New Yorker in "Slow Ideas: Some innovations spread fast. How do you speed the ones that don't?":

*"In the era of the iPhone, Facebook, and Twitter, we've become enamored of ideas that spread as effortlessly as ether. We want frictionless, "turnkey" solutions to the major difficulties of the world—hunger, disease, poverty. We prefer instructional videos to teachers, drones to troops, incentives to institutions. People and institutions can feel messy and anachronistic. They introduce, as the engineers put it, uncontrolled variability.*

*"But technology and incentive programs are not enough. "Diffusion is essentially a social process through which people talking to people spread an innovation," wrote Everett Rogers... Mass media can introduce a new idea to people. But, Rogers showed, people follow the lead of other people they know and trust when they decide whether to take it up. Every change requires effort, and the decision to make that effort is a social process.*

*"This is something that salespeople understand well. I once asked a pharmaceutical rep how he persuaded doctors—who are notoriously stubborn—to adopt a new medicine. Evidence is not remotely enough, he said, however strong a case you may have. You must also apply "the rule of seven touches." Personally "touch" the doctors seven times, and they will come to know you; if they know you, they might trust you; and, if they trust you, they will change. That's why he stocked doctors' closets with free drug samples in person. Then he could poke his head around the corner and ask, "So how did your daughter Debbie's soccer game go?" Eventually, this can become "Have you seen this study on our new drug? How about giving it a try?" As the rep had recognized, human interaction is the key force in overcoming resistance and speeding change."*

What else is needed?

**APPEALING TO A DEEPER SENSE OF PURPOSE.** This effort is NOT merely aimed at solving a specific education problem. It is also aimed at modeling and nurturing a civic culture where people truly feel part of the same community and responsible for one another and for the community as a whole -- the sort of community that most of us would say we want to live in.. The deeper part of this project is restoring a "common faith," a civic faith, that we are all part of the same "world house," as Martin Luther

King put it, and that we have a purpose in our lives that transcends our narrow self-interest. King put it eloquently: "One of the great problems of mankind is that we suffer from a poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually."

This idea that we have a deeper purpose is both challenging and comforting—and motivating. We don't have to do all the work ourselves, don't have to accomplish everything that needs accomplishing in our lifetimes. We are part of a larger endeavor. While too many people today seem detached from this shared endeavor, at the same time many consciously or unconsciously long for a sense of deeper meaning. More than 90 percent of Americans believe in God, which for most implies some larger sense of purpose. Consider too some of the most successful movies in the past ten years like the Harry Potter series, Star Wars, the Lord of the Rings Trilogy or the various superhero blockbusters. Storytelling and action are part of their appeal, but so too is the sense of a larger purpose we long for at some level. The findings of social psychology make the same point.<sup>vii</sup>

This faith helps sustain tutor/mentors through the challenges in their work; gives young people a firm grounding to return to in their quest to define their lives and a feeling that they can play an important role in the world no matter what their present circumstances; and helps all of us better focus on what should be important in our lives.

**MORAL LEADERSHIP.** Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles in his book on the subject quotes a 10-year-old in New Orleans as the city began the process of integrating its schools, "A moral leader is someone who isn't only out for himself. He'll do something that he knows is right to do, even if it'll give him some trouble." In the 1960s moral leadership often meant civil disobedience—individuals making sustained commitments showed the world that they could persevere in their nonviolent resistance and their voter registration drives in the face of violent opposition.

Today, that work requires similar perseverance although organized around a different set of activities. Creating a sense of urgency and commitment is not some mechanical task or marketing challenge, nor is it as simple as throwing money at the problem. It requires moral leadership as the youngster in New Orleans defined it, whether from the mayor, local business, community or nonprofit leaders, or only from ordinary citizens. Civic leaders can quicken the pace of progress if they are willing to lead by their examples. But we can get there just the same with a critical mass of ordinary people willing to lead by example and inspire others. That means getting out and helping with the canvass themselves, becoming tutor/mentors, rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty.

**TRAINING.** Some people are naturals at connecting with kids or have learned the arts of empathy and connection through teaching, parenting or coaching; others have to work at it. To help mentors and tutors connect effectively with youth, this project will provide a range of training tailored to the needs of the programs and age and needs of the youth being served. The Positive Youth Development model taught by staff at Children and Youth Investment Trust, for example, has proven to be a terrific experience for youth workers and teachers and could be scaled to work with many more people.

And this training may also have spillover effects in raising the “emotional and civic intelligence” of participants beyond their roles as tutor/mentors. We all have things we need to learn, whether in working with challenging youth or with family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Building a family, a community, a team or an organization is hard work and takes time and patience. Second, we need to be able to deeply feel our sense of shared purpose – even if it's hidden behind a wall of denial or disengagement.

**WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT AND EXPERIMENT.** By bringing programs and schools into a relatively seamless network and increasing the number of volunteers, it will be easier to find a good match between both the personalities of teachers and students as well as choosing an approach that is most likely to meet the needs of the student. For some, it might be simply reading together with occasional activities for pleasure and learning; for others it could be sports or trips or arts. Mentors and tutors, once they establish a relationship with the families of their students, can often help parents as well. (A two-generation approach working with both at-risk youth and their parents is increasingly proving effective.<sup>viii</sup>) Tutor/mentors can help as informal "health care navigators" linking families to available health care or human services. They can also serve as informal sounding boards for parents, especially those who are more socially isolated, thinking about switching jobs or getting back into the work force. Others may help by preparing a resume or providing transportation to a job interview.

**CONCLUSION:** The road ahead for many young people in our city is likely to be hard. Even with better technical and soft skills or a college education, the likelihood of young people today finding jobs that promise a comfortable middle class life are diminished. Automation, globalization, instability from climate change or—horrible to contemplate—social unrest or terrorism will not be disappearing anytime soon.

There are no simple answers but if there is a hopeful future, it is to be found in community members feeling bound together by a civic faith and deeper purposes – both short and long-term – to unleash the creativity, compassion, and courage that will be needed by all of us. This initiative can make a major contribution to this cause.

#### **Our Advisory Board:**

John De Taeye

- Collaborative Solutions for Communities

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- Communities in Schools (National office)

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- The Urban Institute (Justice Policy Center)

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- Community Building Institute

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- Innovation Research & Training (IRT) & Mentoring Central

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- RaiseDC

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- University of Maryland School of Public Policy, iGIVE

- Former executive director of the White House Council for Community Solutions

Jalisa Whitley

- United Way of the National Capital Area

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<sup>ii</sup> Schorr, Lisbeth. *Within Our Reach* (1989). Page 285. Evidence for the effectiveness of tutoring, mentoring, in-school and after-school programs comes from a wide range of sources. See, for example: Jean Rhodes & David L. DuBois, *Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement* (2006) (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521751.pdf>) . Office of the Deputy Secretary, Planning & Evaluation, Department of Education, *Evidence That Tutoring Works* (2001) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/ERIC-ED464343/pdf/ERIC-ED464343.pdf>).

<sup>ii</sup> *Collective impact* projects, spurred by Kania and Kramer's article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review ([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact/)), the well-publicized successes of the Harlem Childrens Zone, and the Obama Administration's Promise Neighborhood initiative

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(<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html>), seem to have had positive results on balance but the overall impact on educational achievement, whether measured at the state or level of major urban school systems has been modest at best. For example, state proficiency levels in reading have inched up an average of 4-6 percentage points in fifteen years from 1998 to 2013 in 4<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency levels but nearly two-thirds of fourth or eighth graders are still not reading at proficient levels.

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Diane Ravitch (former President George H.W. Bush's Assistant Secretary of Education): *Why I Changed My Mind About School Reform: Federal testing has narrowed education and charter schools have failed to live up to their promise* (March 9, 2010). <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704869304575109443305343962.html>

<sup>iv</sup> For further reading, see James C. Howell, *Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs* (2010) (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/231116.pdf>) .

<sup>v</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/> and [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_tuda\\_2013/#/](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_tuda_2013/#/)

<sup>vi</sup> Author's unpublished estimate.

<sup>vii</sup> See, for example, Martin Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (2011); The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, Department of Psychology, University of Rochester. *Psychological Inquiry* (2000) Vol. 11, No. 4, 227–268. [http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000\\_DeciRyan\\_PIWhatWhy.pdf](http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_DeciRyan_PIWhatWhy.pdf); The Development of Purpose During Adolescence. William Damon, Jenni Menon, Kendall Cotton Bronk *Applied Developmental Science* Vol. 7, Iss. 3, 2003.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/.VAb8oWM09kY#.VAb9P2M09kY>

<sup>viii</sup> See Ascend at the Aspen Institute. *Two Generations, One Future: Moving parents and children beyond poverty together.* (2014). <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/ascend/Ascend-Report-022012.pdf>; summary at *The new War on Poverty: Tackling two generations at once* (2014). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2014/05/07/the-new-war-on-poverty-tackling-two-generations-at-once/>