Youth Mentoring Programs

A summary of the scientific literature on youth mentoring programs.



How This Impacts Children's Development

President Obama launched "My Brother's Keeper" (MBK) initiative in recognition of research showing that boys and men of color are at particular risk for poor outcomes. This program, and other mentoring

programs in the United States have shown to increase the likelihood of students finishing high school, attending college, with reported higher self-esteem, and other positive results.

READ THE BRIEF: How research can help address the goals of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, 2016

READ THE BRIEF: Youth mentoring programs: what leads to success? 2006

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- By 2018, children of color are projected to make up the majority of U.S. youth under age 19, with over 22 million boys and men of color under age 20 as of 2010. By 2050, people of color will comprise the largest percentage of U.S. citizens, including African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians.
- Many youths of color live in impoverished communities with high poverty rates, facing harsher penalties for rule infractions compared to White peers and are less likely to receive second chances. They are disproportionately exposed to violence, both as victims and perpetrators, and are more likely to be incarcerated.
- Three million young people participate in formal one-to-one mentoring relationships in the United States today, six times the number who took part in such programs a decade ago.
- Preliminary studies on the cost-benefit ratios of youth mentoring programs, like Big Brothers Big Sisters, show small but slightly positive returns on investment, with benefits just exceeding costs—an estimated $1.01 for every $1 spent, factoring in both taxpayer and other costs.
- Research tells us effective mentoring relationships require close ties between youth and adults, regular contact, and a duration of at least one year. However, high volunteer turnover remains a significant challenge for mentoring programs.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. State and local policymakers can encourage school districts to consider adopting discipline practices that improve restitution and personal responsibility, rather than rely on punishment.
2. Policymakers can review juvenile and criminal justice procedures and punishments for bias.
3. Federal policymakers can extend access to college by expanding loan forgiveness policies.

4. Policymakers can provide incentives for young men of color to consider teaching as part of loan-forgiveness programs, increasing the number of positive role models for boys of color.

READ THE BRIEF: How research can help address the goals of the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, 2016

READ THE BRIEF: Youth mentoring programs: what leads to success? 2006