

Printable Version - Mentoring extremely important at Frankford Elementary and Indian River District

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At Frankford Elementary School in the Indian River School District, some of the state's most impoverished students are assisted by a group of no less than 170 mentors. These mentors "touch the heart of a child" according to mentoring coordinator Bonnie Crowther.

By Michael Short

FRANKFORD - Mentors at Frankford Elementary School know they have no easy task.

There are 170 mentors at the school and there are 500 mentors in the entire Indian River School District.

The mentors provide one-on-one attention and officials say it makes a difference in student's lives. Perhaps that is most apparent at Frankford where many students come from single parent, low-income families and families of ethnic diversity. In other words, students who often aren't expected to succeed.

But succeed they do.

Their success prompted an invitation to principal Duncan Smith to attend the 2007 State of the Union speech by then President George Bush. The success has also prompted many parents to pick Frankford Elementary as a "choice" school.

But it's a success story that goes well beyond any one school. Frankford is but one of many schools in the Indian River School District with active mentoring programs.

Mentors spend time with a child in an academically based program, but it's often more than studying. Mentors listen. They encourage. They guide. They build self-esteem. They act as role models.

It's a program that helps the student succeed academically, but also socially and emotionally. The

original mentor was a character in Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey." When Odysseus, King of Ithaca, went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted the care of his kingdom to Mentor. Mentor served as the teacher and guide to Odysseus's son Telemachus. The dictionary defines a mentor as a "trusted counselor or guide."

Bonnie Crowther, mentoring coordinator for Frankford Elementary, defines it differently. "They touch the heart of a child," she said. Victor Murray, a long-time mentor, said previously that "Letting the kids talk and seeing their faces brighten up (is the most rewarding part). I think I get more out of it than the kids do. They need guidance. They need love . . . I can be a friend."

Studies by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Delaware and Creative Mentoring show that among students who are mentored: eighty one percent are more likely to have improved self-esteem, self-control and self-confidence.

- *Sixty one percent show an improved attitude toward learning.
- *Forty six percent are less likely to start using illegal drugs.
- *Fifty two percent are less likely to skip school.
- *Twenty seven percent are less likely to start drinking.

That's why the Indian River School District has put a strong emphasis on its' mentoring program. "Mentoring is a way for you to meet some of your goals," explained Ivan Neal, administrator of Community Programs for the Indian River District.

Neal is also a mentor. "I like to help students be successful," he said. "You see the benefit the children get out of it. It builds us up as much as it builds them up."

"The need is great at every level, elementary, middle and high school," he added.

In some cases, mentors walk with students, shoot baskets or do crafts. Often, they just listen and give special attention to a child. "It's little things that seem so little that touch a child so much," said Crowther. "It means a lot to these students."

"You see both student's and mentor's faces light up when they see each other."

The District's website says "To be a mentor, you don't need any special skills - just an ability to listen and to offer friendship, guidance and encouragement to a young person growing up today. You'll be amazed by how much you'll get from the experience, too."

Some mentors have recently moved to the area and "they are looking for something to do in a new place. They really come into the program with open arms," Crowther said.

Some of the Spanish IV high school students in the school district help mentor younger children. Other mentors range from college students to senior citizens, but there is a need for even more mentors. "You need a caring heart and you need to want to interact with a child," Crowther said. "I cannot say enough good things about mentoring."

Mentors spend 20 or 30 minutes or up to an hour once per week with a child and there is no cost. You just need to fill out an application (a background check is done at no charge) and complete a three hour training session. Anyone interested in mentoring in the Indian River District can contact Neal at 436-1000 or at <ineal@irsd.k12.de.us. You can also go online to the Indian River District website and fill out an application form at <www.irsd.net.

Or contact your local school district about mentoring opportunities.

Murray, known as "Mister Vick" to the many students he mentors, tell other adults "they will get as much out of this as the kids, or more. . . I challenge them or encourage them or ask them to start mentoring."

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